

LONDON^{THE} READER

of Literature, Science, Art, and General Information.

[ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.]

No. 1419.—VOL. LV.]

FOR THE WEEK ENDING JULY 12, 1890.

[PRICE ONE PENNY.]



["YOU'RE A MAN AFTER MY OWN HEART!" MR. DORNTON CRIED, AS HE SHOOK HANDS WITH PHIL'P.]

HER MISTAKE.

CHAPTER X.

OLD Tom Dornton, as Dr. Gunter called his friend and comrade of many a year, was a man of enormous property, and, consequently, enormous wealth. He had been poor up to middle-age; and then, by a series of extraordinary circumstances, he became possessed all of a sudden of an inheritance that made him the envy of social England for the time. Mr. Dornton was a bachelor, and likely to remain one. He was an ardent sportsman, and declared he would sooner die in the hunting-field than rise to fame and glory in a palace. His sudden accession to wealth was an absolute unhappiness to him; his liberty was curtailed, his pursuits interrupted, because of the business connected with his estates, and the necessary time and care he had to bestow on the same.

The greater portion of his property was given up to coal. His coal mines were among the richest and largest in the United Kingdom,

and a vast trade and population existed in the domain. To the agricultural part of his property Mr. Dornton distinctly inclined, though he knew more about a horse's leg than he did about the price of oats, or how to grow them; but, for the rest of his belongings, he had literally nothing but dislike. As he told Dr. Gunter, his collieries were nothing but a nightmare to him.

"Everything is always going wrong, and I can't set it right. The people are for everlasting going on strike, and demanding more money or my blood; though why my blood should seem of value to them," Mr. Dornton said thoughtfully, "I don't know!"

"The natural desire to annihilate an enemy," Dr. Gunter observed, with a twinkle in his eye. "But I suppose," he added, "you have very good men about you, who help you, and keep these worries from you as much as possible?"

The two old friends were dining together when this conversation took place. It was the evening of the day on which Dr. Gunter had carried his wedding-gift to Hope, and clasped the pearls round her slender throat.

Mr. Dornton, or the Squire as he was generally called among his friends and associates, pushed back his chair sharply.

"Dence take me if I know what sort of men they are!" he said, testily; "they are as much worry to me as the colliers themselves, and more so. I expect they rob me right and left, and do nothing I desire."

"What you want Squire, is one man above everything and everybody—a sort of individual who would relieve you of all responsibility, and keep things going smoothly." Dr. Gunter sipped his old port with relish.

"And where the dence is such a man to come from, eh, Gunter? Produce him; produce him, and, by gad, he shan't have cause to call me a niggard. Why, I would pay him half my income if he would take all the worry off my shoulders!"

"I don't think he would want a quarter as much as that!" Dr. Gunter observed, holding his glass to the light, and criticising it carefully.

"Him—who? You don't mean to say, my dear Gunter, that you know of such an individual?"

"That is precisely what I do mean to say, Squire."

"Good Heaven, you are a wonderful man!" the Squire said, leaning back in his chair, and regarding his old friend with an honest and unspeakable admiration. "You always know everything and everybody, and come to the fore just at the moment you are wanted."

"It's a case of chance, not perspicuity, this time," the doctor laughed; "and, after all, the chance may not be so great either. One can never be sure till one has tested things, and seen the result. I do know a man—a young man, who I think is the very identical article you require. I may be wrong. Of course, I am quite aware of that; but, I also may be right, and, somehow, I fancy I shall prove myself so in the future, as regards Philip Leicester."

The Squire pushed the cigars across the table.

"A young man," he said, rather dubiously. "Yes, a young man, and a man with just the head and the power you require!" Dr. Gunter lit a cigar, and then, in his own short, almost rough way, told all he knew about Leicester, not colouring or endeavouring in the smallest way to influence his friend's mind in favour of his protégé.

The Squire was at once interested in Philip's story as told by the doctor, and felt a distinct liking for the young fellow, more especially when he heard that he was as good a man on a horse and across country as one could wish to meet in a day's march. That in itself was a first-rate credential in his eyes.

He was inclined to engage Philip there and then without further ado had not Dr. Gunter objected.

"You can see Leicester to-morrow if you like, and talk to him, and put him through his paces, but you must go about the business in a proper fashion. Try and realise your position for once!" the doctor added, with that twinkle in his eye again.

"Good Heaven, that I above all men in the world should have been chosen for such a position," groaned the Squire. "I, who hate the sight of a pen and ink, and have shirked a lawyer all my life, to have all this confounded worry put on to me when I am growing old and grey!"

"You have been grey ever since you were a lad, so that won't do!" Gunter laughed, as he finished his wine. "Am I to send this young chap to you?"

"Send him at once—to-night, if possible. I feel I shall like him. He must be the right sort if he has crept into your heart, Jim, old fellow. In any case, I am interested in his story. No doubt he has been shamefully treated, and if he can't help me in the way I want I can help him. He needs work, you say? Well, if he won't do for the big one, I can soon find him a post somewhere."

"Always the same good, generous heart," the doctor said, stretching his hand across the table, and shaking the Squire's heartily. "You are the proper person to have money, after all, for you have a memory for others, and do all the good you can," and then the old comrades drifted into another conversation, and the matter dropped.

The result of it was an interview between Philip and Mr. Dornton, and an almost immediate proposal from the Squire, that the young man should undertake the duties of general manager and overseer to the Dornton Estates, at a salary that Philip regarded as altogether too much.

The Squire, however, refused to listen to anything he might say on this point, but agreed, with a sigh, that the young man should be engaged for six months only at the outset, so that it might be seen, if possible, how he could get on. This position was a unique one, but exceedingly onerous.

"You are to be me," the Squire said, with a high sigh of relief. "I leave everything in your hands—everybody is to come to you. You are master absolute and entirely. I shall have a sort of manifesto printed that I have

empowered you to act for me altogether, and that all my tenants and people are to look to you for orders and arrangements. Gad! it's an awful prospect for any man!"

Philip smiled as he looked at the ruddy, cheery face before him, positively agashed at the thought of so much anxiety and trouble.

"It is a very serious one," he answered gravely. "I only trust I may be able to cope with it and all its responsibilities. I can only say I will do my best to succeed!"

"And you will succeed. I know it; I am sure of it! I can see it in your face!" The Squire put out his hand, and shook Philip's warmly. "I like you—I like your face. You are a gentleman and a sportsman—no man need be better. I am sure we shall do well together, you and I."

"One thing sir," Philip said, basitantly, as he took his leave. "You are offering me a chance in the world such as a few men could hope to get. Forgive me if I ask you one question. Is there no one belonging to you—a nephew, a cousin, or a kinsman of some sort—who might naturally feel aggrieved at being passed over for a complete stranger? Is there none who have a better right to this?"

The Squire looked with warm appreciation at the handsome face, with its beautiful eyes and picturesque beard.

"I have no kinsman able or willing to do this. But you are right to have reminded me of what would have been a duty had one existed. Mr. Leicester, I came into this fortune through a series of strange and sad deaths among such as were my kinsmen. All that remains are old, like myself, and unable to take so much responsibility on their shoulders, and my heir—" Mr. Dornton said, with a touch of unconscious Irishism, "is a girl—my only sister's only child—a blossom born to my sister late in life; a nice child, I believe, though I have not seen her much. They are abroad now, I think," the Squire said, quaintly, "that my sister regards the heiress to the Dornton estates as of far more importance than the present owner; but a mother can be forgiven much—eh, Mr. Leicester?"

Philip smiled faintly and said "yes" in a quiet, grave way.

Then future, or rather immediate, arrangements were discussed, and Philip found himself very speedily on the beat of terms with his employer.

"You are not altogether strong yet, my lad. Gunter tells me you want looking after a bit. Better run down with me to Gunnersgate. That's the house I mostly choose for a week's stay. My housekeeper is the right sort, and will coddle you well, and I can get Dwight and Brewster down for a day or so, and you can get the legal side of the business explained to you as much as possible. Gunnersgate is a nice old place, and the country round is as good as you'd care to cross. Oh! I won't take a 'no' I am a tyrant, you will find out; and when I make up my mind to a thing I usually carry it out."

So it was settled, and the day that saw Hope married to Hugh Christie saw Philip Leicester make his start in his new career and new life.

Brenda Grant announced her return to England three weeks following Hope's wedding. Her journey had done her great good. She had conquered herself and overcome her anger and jealousy, as far as it was possible in her nature to do so, and she was determined that she would allow no further signs of her disappointment to escape her to gratify either Hope or her husband.

The love Brenda had felt for Hugh seemed to have faded for the time. She had only a bitter contempt for him. She told herself the disappointment she experienced made her believe herself. She read an account of the quiet wedding, and the old hatred and jealousy against Hope blazed out anew as she learnt that some of the best and the highest in the land had come forward and sent the girl a costly present: the diamonds from the Mar-

quis of Gainsborough, the pearls from the Duke of St. Maur, a connection of the Hampshire family, the customary Indian shawl from the greatest lady in the land, the remembrance to Hugh Christie from her royal son and his charming princess—all those details were gall and wormwood to Brenda Grant.

She felt as though Hope had robbed her—as though she had been cruelly and shamefully wronged. Not all the attention she received at Monte Carlo, and her wealth, allied to a moderately attractive person, soon procured her this, could sooth her at first; but she grew better by degrees, and accustomed herself to the inevitable. She did not hesitate, moreover, to make free use of her association with Sir William Carruthers and his aristocratic connections. She talked affectionately of her dear little sister, Hope, and deplored the fact that her shockingly delicate throat would not permit her to leave the south and go to England for the wedding.

She occupied herself and everyone of her acquaintance in surveying and admiring the magnificent trunk of flowers that was despatched to Thickthorn in time for the ceremony; and the set of sapphires and diamonds which she ordered to be made expressly for Hope was the talk of the whole place. Much vexation of spirit, sleepless nights, to which she was not accustomed, given up to dwelling on her disappointment, produced an interesting pallor, and gave an invalid air to Miss Grant as she walked or drove on the Promenade des Anglais, wrapped in her costly furs, and surrounded by half-a-dozen young men who, with a praiseworthy speed, had forgotten the memory of her tailor father, and would gladly have linked her lot and her fortune with themselves had Brenda only given them the opportunity.

She had taken counsel with herself, and soon determined that it behoved her, beyond and above all else, to be on the best of terms with Hugh Christie and his wife. To quarrel would be an absolute madness; and, besides, apart from the desirability of being seen about with Hope, and introduced into the circles she most aspired to, was the malicious satisfaction that she would at least be gratified by watching the rose-bloom of illusion swept off the girl's happiness; and knowing that she would be a witness to the sorrow and heart-ache that must eventually, sooner or later, be the portion of Hugh Christie's wife. Brenda had one big ambition now, and that was to make a marriage that would utterly eclipse her step-sister's, and place her in a higher position than that which Hope held.

She could have married half-a-dozen times if she had chosen to encourage the impecunious men who fluttered in her train; but Brenda was no fool, and she told herself that, with Hope's assistance, she would, in all probability, carry out her plan, obtaining just the husband she desired.

Hugh Christie had long since dismissed Brenda from his mind. She would never have occupied a second thought of his had not her money been an allurements at one time; but Hope was touched, and pleased, that her step-sister should have remembered her wedding-day in so generous and magnificent a fashion. She felt in her tender little heart that she had wronged Brenda in some degree, and resolved, in future, to do all in her power to establish an affectionate and sincere liking between them. Dr. Gunter alone, seemed to read between the lines; and when Hope had shown him the sapphires and diamonds glittering on their velvet cases, and made him stoop and bury his face in the masses of roses, lilies, mimosa, and other blossoms sent from Monte Carlo, the old doctor merely granted in his shortest fashion, and refused to express an opinion on Miss Grant's suddenly developed affection and interest.

"She's as full of tricks as a colt. I only wish she were as harmless in intention. My poor little fairy. How easily she believes, how

pleased she is at this seeming kindness and remembrance. I should like to open her eyes to warn her a little and yet—yet—” Dr. Gunter had said, with a sigh. “Why should I be the one to brush aside the veil of illusion and happy faith? The world will work this soon enough, alas! Let her remain in innocence and ignorance as long as she can.”

The young couple were abroad when Brenda arrived in England, and she went, of course, to Thickthorn, where her advent produced a gloom in the servants' quarters passing all description. It was very soon evident, however, to all, that there had come a change over Miss Brenda, and that the drastic regulations which she enforced so peremptorily before her departure were for the moment discarded. Miss Grant, in fact, did not intend to remain longer at Thickthorn than she could help; and she had lost all her old zest and delight in maintaining the position she had held in the old house. Half the pleasure was gone when Hope was no longer there to be vexed and pained in some way or other; and, besides, Brenda was eager to be in town, and to settle her future as her ambition and jealousy dictated.

She would have liked to have gone direct to Hope's tiny little house in Cadogan-square, and have remained there for the season, but it was scarcely possible to arrange this, seeing that no such invitation had been vouchsafed her, and she could not propose it herself. She therefore determined, much to Lady Carruthers' dismay, that her mother must forget her ailments for a while, and chaperone her, or do so ostensibly in the orthodox fashion.

Each preceding season Brenda had dispensed with her mother's services, and such gaiety as she had had she had shared with friends, but this year she was flying higher. She resolved to revolve in Hope's circle, and to mix with Hope's set.

She worked her way very cleverly. Sir William was overjoyed at the proposed migration to town. He would be able to slip away as often as he liked, and spend whole quiet weeks down at his beloved Thickthorn. It did not matter much to Brenda what view her mother took on the subject. She willed that things should be thus; and thus they were.

Hope, simple child, happy in her first days of marriage—so happy that at times she would sit and ask herself dreamily if it could be she, really she herself, who was living this sunny life—never doubted the genuineness of Brenda's late professed friendship and sisterly affection.

Hugh always smiled to himself, and crossed his monstache when Hope spoke of Brenda. He put a different construction on Miss Grant's change of front—a construction that emanated from his vanity alone. He imagined that Brenda was really madly in love with him; and that, for the sake of that love, she was paying the way for a possible friendship with them, and so a probable happiness for herself. If the thought crossed his mind that the social position had a great deal to do with the matter it came only as a natural result, for Brenda's snobbishness was well known to Hugh.

He did not check Hope in her eagerness to respond to Brenda's apparent kindness.

“After all she is a d-d smart woman, and knows her world. An amusing woman is worth her weight in gold,” Captain Christie said to himself, as he struggled a yawn, and sat down to breakfast one morning in Paris when his marriage was about three weeks' old. Hope had breakfasted hours before, and was out with her smart new Parisian maid (of whom she was desperately afraid), keeping the appointment with the celebrated dress-maker which Hugh had himself arranged the preceding day.

Hope had demurred laughingly,—

“More dresses, darling,” she had cried.

“Why, I have at least a dozen!”

“You ought to have a dozen dozen,” Hugh had said lazily. “Not a rag too many for a woman in your position. Besides, you must have something from Marthe; it is absolutely

imperative. I want my wife to be well dressed above all things.”

Hope smiled at him, but she felt that it was a needless expense. She thought of the little chat she had had with her father the day before her marriage.

“A thousand a year is not bad for a beginning, but you won't find it go very far, my fairy,” Sir William had said, thinking ruefully how very little way a thousand went with him. “You must out your cloth carefully. Hugh has a good head for business, so I daresay it will be all right.”

“But we have more than a thousand a year, Daddy,” Hope had said. “Remember, Hugh has his own money, which is very nearly as much as mine.”

Sir William had shaken his head dubiously.

“Don't fancy you will find it as much as that, but you may. However, my poppet, I only want to warn you against extravagance,” and then Sir William had laughed, “and a nice one I am to talk, am I not—eh, fairy?”

Hope had replied with a loving word and a kiss, and the matter had dropped, but it came to her mind in Paris, as Hugh insisted on new hats and frocks.

“My dear,” he had answered to her little protestations, “you must do this. Surely I know best what you must do, and Marthe will not trouble you for twelvemonth at least—probably two years!”

“Go into debt!” Hope said, quickly. She had intended paying for these new gowns out of the cheque for a hundred pounds which her godmother, a certain Lady Lascelles, had sent her. But Hugh spoke so decisively Hope felt she had better not suggest this.

She returned to London with a tiny little cloud on the horizon of her happiness, caused by the remembrance of those costly dresses and the day when Marthe would require payment for them; but she was so young, and life was so full of new delights, that it was only natural this cloud should soon pass. And indeed in the excitement and pleasure of her house and all its appointments Hope speedily forgot this first cloud.

The house was one that belonged to the Hampshire estate on a long lease, and Lady Hampshire had placed it at her grandchild's disposal, as she never left Blairton, or came to London at all nowadays. Hugh found, indeed, that in marrying Hope he had done very well, on the whole; for beyond her fortune she received considerable additions in the shape of gifts or assistances, such as the matter of the house, from her many relations; and the prospect, save, perhaps, for a touch of restraint and a little boredom now and then, was very satisfactory.

Hope's money had been settled on herself, but, unfortunately, she had the power to reinvest or deal with it as she chose, and this Hugh was quick to take advantage of; and before she had been married more than a month the girl had signed away at least a good ten thousand of her capital, to be invested in some magnificent speculation about which Hugh knew every thing.

“We will double this,” he had said to her, as, the necessary papers in his possession, Hugh prepared to go and draw out the money and lodge it at his bank, and then, with some hesitation, despite his selfishness and mercenary feelings he was a gentleman, Hugh had added, “and we will keep all those transactions to ourselves—eh, my little wife? That is unless, of course, you would like—”

Hope had interrupted him with one of her ready blushes, and a tender kiss.

“Are we not one?” she said, softly, “What you do is as though I did it myself. You are my husband; there is no one in the world who can know better what to do for me than you, my dearest.”

Hugh had winced at this, but the next moment he had laughed and returned her kiss with interest.

“My poetical little fairy!” he said, pinching her cheek, and then he had driven away

Citywards; and Hope had sat down in her pretty little boudoir, and fallen into a happy reverie over him and over her happiness.

Her dream was still so new, so beautiful. She had not grown accustomed to it yet. She lived in a world peopled with beautiful thoughts, and bathed in perpetual sunshine. There was not a jarring note, not a shadow to cloud or darken her ecstasy. The flowers that were peeping up, coaxed into being by the spring light and warmth, were not more innocently happy and content than Hope in this the commencement of her young life. She felt that she was so richly blessed, she must, perforce, give out of her bounty to others, who were not so rich as she. To one and all she was full of gentle thought and kindness, and she responded to Brenda's overtures of friendship with a warmth and simplicity that were from her heart, and absolutely sincere. She had no one person in particular to advise or to take counsel with, or, maybe, Miss Grant would not have succeeded so well; for though she deceived Hope, she must have been gauged by a woman of the world. And thus Hope sowed the seeds of that, which cultivated and reared by Brenda Grant's jealous hatred, would grow into a harvest of bitter disappointment and sorrow in the future.

The Squire found his heart go out more and more to his new steward. They spent not one but three quiet weeks at Gunnersgate, a large rather ugly, country house, with, however, magnificent covers, and adjacent to a pack of the best hounds in all the kingdom. Philip, despite his weakness, insisted on getting on to a horse, and demonstrated even in his feebleness that he justified all the praise Dr. Gunter had bestowed on him as a thorough horseman.

“You're a man after my own heart,” Mr. Dornton cried heartily, as he clasped hands with Philip when they both dismounted. “The sort of son I'd like to own, by gad!”

Philip's lips quivered beneath his monstache. “And yet,” he thought bitterly to himself, “my own father cast me out of his life, and turned his back on me without a second thought. How curious life is! Here is a man who knows nothing of me, content and eager to accept me on my own story, and there was a man who had cause to know my nature well, to see that at all events, in those days I was spotless, and pure as a child, who cut me off from him and broke my boyish heart with as little regret as though I were a block of stone cast down before him.

“The exchange is a good one,” the young man thought on bitterly, as he looked after the cheery, kind-hearted, kind-spoken Squire; and a memory of a tall thin form, an iron, handsome face, rose before him. “The past is dead and buried, Philip Leicester. Let it lie, and live for the future, my man, for the future, and all that it may bring.”

At the end of his week at Gunnersgate Philip took his departure for Meckington, the head town of the Dornton Collieries. Mr. Dornton accompanied him on his journey there for the purpose of personally introducing the young man to those who were to work with him and be under him.

“I hope you will get on with them, Philip,” the Squire said, somewhat nervously; “they are an awful rough lot!”

“I have faced a rougher,” Philip said, calmly.

His spirits rose, and he felt his strength revive as he walked through the grimy town that was to be his home for the next six months at least, probably for years if he succeeded in his work. He told himself he should certainly not fail if it depended on his own individual self for success, and he seemed to grow another man as he realised that at last life was opening out to him, and a chance lay before him. He would work now not only for his own sake, but for the sake of those two men who were befriending him so truly. It would be a pleasure to feel he was repaying them both as far as lay in his power. It would be an honourable duty to prove that the confidence

they expressed in him was not falsely born, that he was indeed and in truth the honest upright man they thought—a man fitted for the post bestowed on him, and worthy their friendship and trust.

Philip had imagined, naturally enough, that there would be great difficulties attending him, but he speedily found that his imagination had been weak in picturing these difficulties in their reality. The Squire's announcement and introduction of Leicester as his sole and entire representative was received with much apparent satisfaction from those whom it most concerned; but Philip had learned much in his wanderings, and he saw at once that he was likely to find his path beset with barriers raised up by spite, jealousy, and dislike, and that his duty to his friend and his employer would be rendered a doubly difficult task in consequence.

However, he kept his misgivings to himself, and, to the Squire's delight, entered most fully and in the most business like way into every matter connected with his future career, impressing the lawyers most favourably with his quick brain and shrewd, common sense.

Mr. Dorton himself lodged the young man in the house set apart for him.

"It's a doleful look out, nothing but chimneys, coal-dust and soot. You will grow shades darker, I believe, Philip, after you have been here six months. You must get away from Meckrington on every possible occasion. Strange as it may seem, the country about three miles off is simply lovely, and when you get into Leamshire you know for yourself you are in a garden of beauty and freshness! You must promise me to ride out of the smoke and dust as often as you can. There are all sorts of places worth seeing. Blairton is only about four miles off—the place where old Hampshire lived, poor old soul. I fancy the Countess is there still. She is a great friend of mine, and as good a woman as ever breathed. By the way, of course Carruthers married her daughter Sybil—a lovely creature, I remember. I suppose Gunter's special pet—his fairy, as he calls her, must be pretty too. The Sherwoods were all famed for their beauty and their sweetness of disposition—rare gifts to come together, eh, Philip, my lad?"

"Gifts which I am sure Miss Car—Mrs. Christie I mean, inherits," Philip said, hurriedly.

His eyes had gone over the town and all its grime to the particular spot where the Squire said Blairton stood. He knew it well by name, and by hearing Hope speak of the beautiful old place, and he derived a sort of pleasure in feeling that he was so near to it. It was almost like a link between them. He promised himself that his first holiday should be to ride over towards Blairton and see it for himself.

"You want a housekeeper of some sort," the Squire said, as he went all over the house, and noted what was lacking for comfort and for necessity, "or else you will starve yourself to death, I expect. Shaw is the woman to help us in this. By-and-by, I suppose," the old gentleman added, "you will be taking unto yourself a wife, eh? What do you say, never marry? Pooh! pooh! You are much too good-looking a chap for that. Why, you will be married by force one of these days, I warn you!"

Philip laughed and coloured a little; his handsome face and picturesque bearing troubled him but little. Vanity was wanting in his composition altogether; and woman, as we have said, until the time he met Hope, and was wooed unconsciously to higher thoughts of the sex through her sweetness, held no charm for him. Even the thoughts he had for Hope possessed no actual form or definite shape.

She lived in his mind as something fragrant and beautiful—something that was an impulse to cast out his bitter, cynical thoughts and look on life with a different gaze, something that was associated with all that was pure and good in his nature—an influence, not an individuality. He had received her

portraits, as she had promised, but he let them lie in his portmanteau. He had no need of a picture to recall her face, and he hesitated to let others gaze on her, and perhaps conjecture how it was that he possessed such things.

On her wedding-day he had sent down to Thickthorn a basket of the rarest flowers he could choose! and beneath the lid he had put his card, with no written word of any sort, and Hope had sent him a letter of pretty thanks from Paris, which he kept with her other letter, and her photographs.

Mr. Dorton took his departure at length, when he had thoroughly satisfied himself that he had done all he could to make the lad comfortable, and Philip went with him to the station and wrung his hand warmly at parting.

"I thank you, sir, from the bottom of my heart for all your goodness to me. I only hope I may prove myself worthy of it. I shall do my best to deserve the trust you have bestowed upon me!"

"And you will succeed. You will succeed, my lad, I know. Take care of yourself, and don't work too—gad! I feel like a brute leaving you in this grimy place. You must come to Gunnersgate if you want air, and, remember, write to me very often, and—"

And then the train started, and Philip was left alone on the platform, with a smile on his lips, and a feeling of almost affection in his heart for the man just gone.

"The past is buried," he said to himself, as he walked through the streets, where he was eyed curiously by the rough-mannered, grimely-garbed inhabitants. "I will try and forget all my father's cruel injustice; my—my mother's shame, my lost inheritance. Yes, I will forget. I must!" he reared his noble head proudly, "To remember is to destroy myself, and though I have lost so much, yet I have not lost all. Men there are who still hold me honest and honourable. By Heaven's help I will prove to them they do not hold me so in vain! The future is my own; my future shall triumph over the past!"

(To be continued.)

ETHEL'S FLIRTATION.

—:—

CHAPTER XXXII.

No one knew how the fire at The Firs originated, and the valiant rescue of Annie was the principal theme of conversation the next ten days.

The simple village folk would have had much more to arouse their interest had they but known of the thrilling episodes that were taking place in the temporary home in which the Whiteley's, with Harry and his mother, had taken up their abode.

The utter consternation of the lawyer and his wife upon beholding Annie, and learning that she had been rescued from the tower of The Firs, can better be imagined than described.

Yes, this was certainly Annie in the flesh, and the girl who had died in the railway accident and been buried in her name had led them into a terrible mistake. But there was one thing that both the lawyer and his wife were thankful for, and that was, that Harry, who had so recently wed their darling Ethel, had been legally separated from Annie.

"But what was she doing in the tower of The Firs?" they asked each other in amazement as they bent over her unconscious form.

"There is but one theory practicable," returned Mr. Whiteley; "we know she was not a guest, and it is my opinion that, knowing the ways of the place the girl succeeded in gaining an entrance to the house to witness the marriage of Ethel and Harry, which she must have done, and the diabolical scheme entered her head to fire the place that they might thus perish. She found no opportunity

to put her scheme into practice until to-night, and I also quite believe that the flames spread so rapidly retreat from below was literally out off, and she was obliged to take refuge in the tower, where her awful crime came near recoiling on her own head.

"It was a strange irony of fate," he added, in a husky voice, "that Harry should have saved our Ethel, his bride, and then went back and rescued this girl at the risk of his own life. She had planned to take all our lives in a most dastardly fashion. We were saved by almost a miracle. That is a bad cut on Harry's head. I doubt if he will be about for many a day. A piece of falling burning timber must have struck him."

"I can think of nothing save what Ethel will say when she hears all, as she must, sooner or later. With her usual goodness of heart she will attempt to shield the girl from punishment for her terrible crime," returned Mrs. Whiteley.

"I cannot believe that Annie ever set fire to The Firs," said Mrs. Venn, slowly. "I would as soon believe an angel from heaven guilty of it."

Both Mr. Whiteley and his wife were surprised to hear Harry's mother defend her.

"You might be the last one expected to make a remark of that kind," returned the lawyer, slowly.

"Why?" exclaimed Mrs. Venn anxiously. "Because of her faithlessness to Harry," he returned.

He saw her eyes fill, and she turned quickly away to hide her emotion.

"She left your son for another," he went on, sternly; "therefore why should you have faith in the girl and expect anything but dishonour from her?"

"I have always believed there is something yet to be explained about that affair," replied Mrs. Venn in a tremulous voice. "She loved Harry so well. Ah! she idolised him. I am sure of that."

"The letter you found in her room does not look as though she cared for him," put in Mrs. Whiteley, adding: "therefore I say your pity is wasted upon her."

"But what disposition shall we make of the girl," she added, turning to her husband; "send her to the hospital?"

It was Mrs. Venn who answered.

"She must remain here," she said, decisively, "where I can watch over and nurse and care for her. She once saved my son's life—the memory of that sweeps all else from my mind when I see her lying there ill and helpless."

Mr. Whiteley and his wife faced her simultaneously.

"Here! under this roof—with Harry?" they both echoed in a breath.

"I will not permit it!" cried Mrs. Whiteley, indignantly. "Nothing of the kind shall be done; it would be the grossest of insults to our Ethel."

"I shall nurse Annie until she is out of danger," replied Mrs. Venn, gently, but firmly. "If you desire to turn her from your door, weak and ill as you see she is, I simply say it is my place to follow her."

"I see we shall have to compromise the matter," said Mr. Whiteley. "Let the girl remain here until she is able to depart, if you will, but we shall take your son's bride—our Ethel—away. Of course you will not object to Harry's being taken where his wife is. That will be practically abandoning the place to the young woman who has attempted to murder us all in our beds."

"I cannot be parted from my son," said Mrs. Venn, distressfully.

They settled the matter reluctantly at length, that Annie might be permitted to remain beneath that roof for the present at least, but that all knowledge of this great indignity, as they phrased it, be kept from Ethel, and in no enviable frame of mind Mr. Whiteley and his wife quitted the room, leaving Mrs. Venn alone with Annie, who was still unconscious.

It was not until they reached their own apartment that husband and wife gave vent to their anger in having Annie beneath that roof.

"I see how it will end!" cried Mrs. Whiteley, confronting her husband with white face and gleaming eyes. "If Annie remains here under the same roof with Harry Venn he will desert Ethel, and go back to that girl, that is the point his mother is working for. I can see it ahead, and—and—oh, husband, it would kill Ethel—she loves him so!"

"That which you predict will never come to pass," returned Mr. Whiteley, hoarsely. "No man shall ever forsake my daughter and find happiness with another woman while I live. I would shoot Venn down first!"

But the thought of handsome Harry lying wounded—shot down by her husband's hand, brought no comfort to Mrs. Whiteley's agitated mind, and she said so.

"Something must be done to prevent such a catastrophe," she repeated, vehemently.

For a moment her husband paced impatiently up and down without replying.

His face was set in a deep frown—a habit he had when thinking intently.

"There is but one effectual way of removing this girl from Ethel's path," he said, harshly. "And that way?" asked his wife in a low, breathless voice.

"Is to have her convicted of arson, and sent to prison."

Mrs. Whiteley drew her breath with a gasp of dismay.

"Is she not guilty?" he asked, harshly. "She would have burned us all in our beds had not Ethel fortunately discovered the smoke ere the whole house was enveloped in flames. What mercy should be shown the perpetrator of so dastardly an act when so many human lives were at stake?"

"None," replied his wife, decidedly. "The crime does indeed deserve severe punishment, but one has to steel one's heart considerably to contemplate the end. I will go and see how Ethel is; the shock has almost killed her, I am afraid," said Mrs. Whiteley, preferring to quit the room rather than discuss the unpleasant subject further.

She found Ethel kneeling beside the couch on which they had placed Harry.

She looked up as her mother entered, but did not change her position, save to tighten her arms more closely about her young husband's neck.

"How did it happen, mother?" she whispered, indicating the great red, irregular scar up on his white forehead. "The men who brought him here could not, or would not, tell me."

"A burning beam fell upon him," replied Mrs. Whiteley, crossing the room to where Ethel knelt, and fondly kissing the lovely, tearful, upturned face. "He is not seriously hurt, my darling," she added, with a show of cheerfulness she was very far from feeling; "do not alarm yourself unnecessarily about him."

"How can I help but feel the keenest alarm when I love him so?" murmured Ethel, laying her soft, warm cheek against Harry's colourless, cold one. "I love him better than life itself, mamma!"

"Oh, my dear," cried Mrs. Whiteley in alarm, "such idolatry is very wrong! You must not give yourself up so completely to love for Harry. I—I—tremble to see and hear you! Think what would become of you if—if—anything should ever happen to—to—take him from you!"

"Let me tell you what would happen, mamma," she whispered, in a low, intense voice: "I should either drop dead when the news first reached me, or I should go mad!"

"I hope you will never lose him until you are both old, and have walked down the hill of life together," her mother answered, solemnly. "I wish you had not made that remark, though, about dying or going mad; it will always trouble me when I think of it."

"Then do not think of it, mamma," she returned, promptly, "or forget what I said."

"If I only could," sobbed her mother, fervently.

"But you have not told me what caused the scar on his forehead," she persisted. "Tell me about it quickly, before the doctor comes. I think you said something about a burning beam falling upon him, but you must be mistaken. I do not remember any such occurrence."

"It was after he brought you out that it happened," replied Mrs. Whiteley. "He went back into the burning building to—to—rescue a woman, and bringing her out nearly cost him his life. Had the beam struck him fairly on the head it would have killed him."

"He went back to save—a woman!" repeated Ethel in wonder. "I thought the servants were all out? I saw them—every one."

"There was a woman in the tower. He saved her," responded Mrs. Whiteley.

She never forgot to her dying day the wild cry that broke from Ethel's bloodless lips, and the next instant she had fallen to the floor a senseless heap at her mother's feet.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

MRS. WHITELEY did not summon one of the servants when Ethel swooned, but did her best to revive her daughter herself.

"My poor darling!" she sobbed, kissing the lovely marble-white face and dark curling hair. "I wonder that the blow did not kill her!"

At last, when all her efforts seemed futile, Mrs. Whiteley, in alarm, summoned her husband.

The lawyer's brow darkened as he entered and discovered the condition of affairs as rapidly related by his wife.

He did not know that the dark eyes had slowly opened while he asked the question, and that Ethel realised its import at once, and listened for the answer with breathless intensity.

Mrs. Whiteley pointed to Ethel, her face whitening.

"You should have waited until we were alone before you asked that question," she said; "she has heard it."

"I might as well know all, mamma," Ethel sobbed. "Did Harry recognise Annie before he—he went to her rescue?"

Neither her father nor mother could answer this, but both were forced to admit that they thought it quite likely.

At that moment a messenger appeared at the door to say that Mr. Venn was calling for Ethel.

"I will go to him alone," she said, rising hastily from her couch. "If we should want either or both of you, I will call you."

With that Ethel glided from the room.

Harry was seated in a reclining chair by the window when she entered his apartment. She was startled at the expression on his face as she came up to him; she had never seen that look on it before, and the grave expression of it filled her soul with the keenest alarm.

"Sit down, Ethel," he said in a hoarse, constrained voice, "while I tell you that which will startle you greatly."

She obeyed mutely.

"I have no doubt that they have told you how I went back to The Firs after I carried you out and to safety to save a young girl from being burned to death in the tower."

"Yes," said Ethel.

It almost seemed to her that she could not have uttered another word if her life had depended upon it.

"That young girl was—Ah, how shall I tell you the astounding discovery I made? She was Annie, my—"

He stopped short, looking confused and distressed.

He saw Ethel's face grow alarmingly pale, and he went on huskily.

"The girl in the railway accident whom we all thought was Annie, and whom we buried in the family vault, was not she. How she came to be in that tower is a mystery to me. I do not know who was there when I resolved upon the perilous undertaking. I only knew that a woman was in danger, and not one would peril his life to save her."

"When I reached the tower I found the door locked, and hearing moans from within I burst it open; and—ah, Ethel, I shall never forget while life lasts the sight that met my view! In the middle of the floor knelt a figure, clearly outlined against the crimson glare in the background, the white face and white arms were uplifted heavenward—I knew she was praying."

"She heard my quick step and turned her face toward me, crying out: 'Help! Save me! Oh, save me!'"

"The voice fairly paralysed me—held me spell-bound for an instant, and when I saw her face I almost felt my heart break with horror, it seemed to me so like Annie's."

"Then she turned and saw me, and we looked into each other's face by the bright red glare of light."

"Harry!" she cried, in a voice that sounded like a voice from the tomb, "it is I—Annie! You did not know that, or you would not have come to save me. Save your life, never mind me. Let me die!" and with those words she sunk senseless at my feet."

"I grasped her in my arms and hurried down the winding stair. Then commenced my fight for life—ay, two lives."

"The heat suffocated me, the flames drove me back at every step, and the great volumes of black smoke blinded me, but with energy born of despair I pushed on, but just as I reached the window a burning beam struck me. How I reached the window and clambered down the ladder with my heavy burden I have but a faint recollection, but this much I do remember—within a few feet of the ground my overstrained nerves gave way completely and I knew no more. The doctor who attended me says they caught me as I fell and took her unharmed from my arms, and that she is being cared for beneath this roof. I—I thought it best that you should hear the story from my lips."

He was startled at the expression on Ethel's death-white face. She completely lost control of herself.

"When you found out who it was why didn't you leave her there to die?" she cried, excitedly.

He recoiled from her as though she had dealt him a sudden blow.

"Ethel," he said, sternly, "you do not mean that horrible remark—you could not?"

"I do mean it!" she reiterated, wildly and vehemently, adding: "If you had had proper spirit, after the way she served you, you would have left her to her fate."

"Heaven forbid!" answered Harry Venn, sternly. "May Heaven find pardon for you for those unfeeling, unwomanly words. I could not have believed such words had fallen from your lips had I not heard them. I would risk my life to save even an avowed enemy if I saw him in such peril, and had even the remotest hope of saving him. And—and when I saw that it was Annie I—I would have risked a dozen lives, had I possessed them, to rescue her!"

"It is because you love her still!" cried Ethel, shrilly. "You need not deny it! Is it not so?"

"It is too late to talk on that subject now," he retorted, coldly. "I decline to discuss it." A bitter, sneering laugh fell from Ethel's lips.

"No doubt you are delighted to have her under the same roof that you may pose as a noble hero and receive her gratitude. Now hear me! the same house is not big enough for both; either she or I must leave it!"

"Ethel," he cried, huskily, "I entreat you to say no more at such a time. She is not able to be removed. I will take you away,

if you really desire it, as soon as I am able to go. More I cannot promise."

"You must promise me one thing," cried Ethel, eagerly. "Say you will do as I wish."

"How can I answer you without knowing what it is that you wish me to do?" he said, gravely; adding: "This much I will say: If it is in reason, and will not impair my honour as a gentleman, I would have no choice but to comply."

"Then you will not give me your promise beforehand?"

"No," he replied, decisively.

There was deep, constrained silence between them for a moment.

Ethel crept up close to him, laying her burning hands on his.

"Promise me that you will never look upon Annie's face again," she cried, hoarsely, "that you will not go to her, not even if she sends for you."

He started back and looked at her sorrowfully.

"You ask this in the heat of passion and on the spur of the moment," he said, gently.

"Think this matter over calmly and you will see how embarrassing it would be for me were she to send for me and I refused to go to her. How could I refuse? For what reason? You must see for yourself upon reflection what a dastardly action it would be to refuse. But let me add this—in such a case I should earnestly request you to accompany me, Ethel, for the reason that you appear unable to trust your husband."

"You loved her once—you love her still!" cried Ethel, sternly, "and I repeat you must not go to her even if she were to send for you. It would be an insult to me if you did."

Harry leaned back in his chair, burying his fair, handsome head in his hands with a deep groan.

"You do not deny it, for you know you cannot," cried Ethel, excitedly. "You love her still, I say."

"Hush!" he muttered, hoarsely, "I cannot bear it. You will drive me mad!"

"Why do you not add that you abhor a jealous woman?" she went on, shrilly; "for I am that and more; but I have just cause for jealousy if ever a woman had."

"Under every and any circumstance you should have full faith and trust in the man you have married," he said, slowly, "other wise you wrong him immeasurably."

"You cannot get out of the matter by argument or by showing it up in a false light. You are longing to see her, and you know it!" stormed Ethel.

At that moment there was a hurried tap at the door, and in answer to Harry's "come in" a servant appeared on the threshold.

"I bring a message from the young girl whom you rescued, sir," he said. "She requests to see you if you are able to come to her. What answer am I to take back to her, sir?"

Ethel rose slowly from her kneeling posture and looked Harry full in the face.

How blind he was that he did not read the danger signals in her dark, flashing eyes.

"What do you propose to do?" she asked in a low, intense voice.

He looked greatly disturbed.

The message had come to him so suddenly that he was taken by surprise, and was at a disadvantage.

"What do you propose to do, I repeat?" asked Ethel, in a steady voice.

"I have no choice but to comply with the request," he said, firmly; adding, "I entreat that you do not make a scene. Come with me," he urged, "do come with me. It would be no more than right on your part under the circumstances."

"You shall not go!" cried Ethel. "A wife has the right to dictate where her husband may go and where he may not go, especially if there is another woman in the background."

"Heaven forbid!" replied Harry, indignantly. "A woman who is afraid to trust her husband out of her sight, lest he make love to another woman, degrades the man by

letting him see she has no faith in his honour. Your course has decided my action; I will be gentleman enough to go to Annie!"

CHAPTER XXXV.

Ernest stood before him like a woman suddenly turned to stone. She could hardly credit her senses that Harry would dare defy her openly like this.

He arose from his chair with difficulty and turned toward the door, and would have passed from the room, but Ethel suddenly sprang before him.

Like a flash an idea had come to her—a terrible plan which she quite believed she could carry out if she but had time. Ah! she must have time to execute it at any cost.

"Harry," she whispered, "do this much at least for me. Postpone it until to-morrow, and—and I will go with you."

His face brightened and a glad light came into his troubled eyes, and he took the little hand she laid timidly on his arm eagerly in his own.

"I had hoped your better nature would reassert itself, and that you would think differently of this matter. We ought not to wait when sent for in a case like this, but under the peculiar circumstances which surround it I must defer to your wishes, Ethel."

She muttered a hasty reply, which he did not quite catch.

"Tell the lady I will see her to-morrow," he said to the servant, who still stood patiently in the doorway.

The man bowed and withdrew.

Then, for the first time since their marriage, Harry stooped down and gave her a voluntary caress. He kissed her lightly on the white forehead, quite forgetting how near the perfect trembling lips were.

"It shall be as you say; we will wait until to-morrow, and go together, Ethel," he said, kindly.

They talked an hour or more—or, rather, he talked, believing he had a good listener in Ethel—but not a word did she hear, for her brain was in whirl; she was conceiving surely the maddest scheme that ever found lodgment in a woman's brain!

Long after Harry's eyelids had closed in deep, untroubled sleep, Ethel paced the floor, busy with her turbulent thoughts.

"I will wait until after midnight," she muttered incoherently to herself; "that will be the best time to accomplish the great feat that lies before me."

And while the long hours dragged their slow lengths by, bringing nearer and nearer the still hour for which she waited, a strange scene was being enacted in another portion of the house.

It was in the room in which poor Annie lay.

When she awoke to consciousness and found Mrs. Venn bending over her, an expression of the greatest bewilderment and wonder stole over her face.

"Is it a dream?" she whispered, clasping her little thin white hands and raising her great blue solemn eyes in awe—"is it a dream that I see your face, dear mother—the only mother I have ever known? I—I—have had that dream so often of late," she breathed, in a low whisper. "I am almost afraid to stir lest the sweet vision will vanish."

"It is no dream, Annie," sobbed Mrs. Venn. "I am here, poor child. Are you in any pain? Are you hurt anywhere?"

"I do not understand," murmured Annie. "You were in the tower of The Firs when the terrible fire occurred, you know. Harry heard a woman's cry, and he rushed up and—"

"Did he—save me?" exclaimed the girl, raising herself from her pillow, and with breathless intensity of excitement listening for the reply.

"Yes," answered Mrs. Venn. "Heaven was kind; he was enabled to save you."

Annie hid her white face in her thin, trembling hands, remaining motionless so long that Mrs. Venn grew quite frightened. She fancied the girl must have swooned again.

"Annie!" she whispered, laying her hand on her fair head.

She raised her white face slowly, and there was such deep woe on it that Mrs. Venn could scarcely keep back her tears.

"I wish he had let me die!" moaned the girl. "I have nothing on earth to live for."

"We thought you dead, Annie!" whispered Mrs. Venn, speaking with difficulty, "and—Harry has—Oh, Annie! how shall I tell you?" and the poor lady buried her face in her hands, beginning to weep too.

"Do not grieve, mother—I—I—hope you will let me call you so still—Harry is now married to—Ethel."

Mrs. Venn bowed her head silently in assent.

"Will you forgive me if I ask you one question, Annie?" asked she, wistfully. "You are not bound to answer me unless you care to, but, oh! I should like to know so much, child!"

"Ask of me anything you will," responded Annie, raising her great blue eyes to the other's face.

For a moment Mrs. Venn hesitated, but it was for a moment only, then she bent over the girl, asking sobbingly:

"Will you tell me what prompted you to abandon the young husband you had just wedded, and elope with an old lover? Oh, Annie, we found his letter to you in your room, and it nearly broke all our hearts."

She had expected to see a flash of shame or confusion mantle the girl's fair face; instead she read there only wonder.

Annie did not seem to comprehend the meaning of her words, and she put the question in another form.

"Where did you go, my dear, when you disappeared so suddenly that night?" she asked, very earnestly.

Annie opened her lips to answer, but the words she was about to utter died upon them, leaving no sound.

All in an instant the thought came to her, if she were to divulge the horrible treasure of Ethel, the story would spread like wildfire, and Harry—poor Harry—would die of shame, and then his heart would break; for he loved Ethel so madly. For Harry's sake—yes, for his sake and his alone—she must spare Ethel, her cruel foe.

"I cannot tell you what was the cause of my leaving," she moaned, faintly. "You—you would not wonder that my lips are sealed if—it—you but knew all."

These words put to flight the last remnant of hope that had lingered in Mrs. Venn's heart, that, despite all the adverse circumstances, Annie might prove herself guiltless of the sin which hung like a dark mantle about her.

Mrs. Venn was kind of heart, and she loved Annie as she would have loved an own daughter, but she could not tolerate so horrible a sin as the one of which she believed Annie to have been guilty. She quite believed that there was no pardon from Heaven for the wife who deliberately fled with another from a true and good husband, or for the husband who forsook a wife.

Annie had sealed her own doom by those hapless words.

"Then you refuse absolutely to tell me?" she interrogated, with a sternness quite foreign to that gentle lady.

"I must," sobbed Annie, wringing her hands.

"I am answered," returned Mrs. Venn, bitterly. "I see I have been most cruelly deceived in you. You are not worthy of my pity. I have mourned for you by night and by day, refusing to be comforted. I see now that it was simply a waste of regret. Henceforth we are strangers."

"Oh, madame, have mercy!" gasped Annie, raising her pure, sweet, agonising young face

to the cold, pitiless one turning so haughtily from her. "Oh, have mercy, and pity me! I must not speak and wreck the life of the one I love. Better that I should suffer like a martyr and die a martyr's death."

"I shall urge you no further," returned Mrs. Venn in a hard voice. "Your guilty secret shall be your own. Heaven may pardon me if I add, I hope that it will lie heavy as stone in your bosom."

Annie's white lips were dumb, but from the depths of her tortured heart there went up a prayer to the listening angels who heard and knew all, to help her to bear her great woe.

"You shall have every attention while you are under this roof—" Mrs. Venn went on, and there she stopped abruptly.

Annie finished the sentence for her.

"But as soon as I am able to—you—you would like me to go?" she asked, wistfully, pitifully.

Mrs. Venn bowed.

"It shall be as you say, madame; indeed, I would have no right to stay, and would not. But oh! it will be so hard—so hard parting from you thus! In all my dreary life you are the only person who has ever spoken kindly to me. I was so lonely, so desolate, so friendless in the great, cold, cruel world you will not wonder that I prized your friendship, and that it was quite as dear to me as life itself. I never went to my bed at night but that I knelt down and thanked Heaven for giving me one true friend."

"It is not too late to revive the dying spark of my friendship even now," returned Mrs. Venn, tremulously. "Make a complete confession to me, and I will try to think more kindly of you. Full repentance is half atonement of a sin committed."

"I cannot tell you," sobbed Annie. "Ah, do not condemn me! I must keep my lips closed for the sake of him whom I love," she moaned, piteously.

"Shameless girl!" cried Mrs. Venn, wrathfully, springing to her feet. "How shocking to hear you flaunt so openly to the very face of the mother whose noble son you have so foully wronged the secret of your love for the cowardly lover with whom you eloped. I wonder you have the effrontery to do it."

Annie bowed her fair young head humbly.

"It is Harry's mother who upbraided me," she told herself, piteously, "and I must bear her anger with fortitude and humility."

But she wondered vaguely that her poor heart did not break as she listened.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

It seemed to poor little Annie, as she lay cowering among the pillows, that her cup of sorrow was filled to the very brim.

She wished the pitying angels, who knew and understood everything, would send death to her then and there. It was the only balm she craved.

But death seldom comes to those who long for it.

"I shall leave you to your own reflections," Mrs. Venn said, quietly, as she turned down the shaded night lamp. "Coralie—that is Ethel's new French maid—will sit with you to-night. If you need me at any time for anything, call me; I will be in the adjoining room, and I will come to you."

"I will not call for you. I will make you as little trouble as I can, Mrs. Venn," sobbed Annie, in a crushed, heart-broken voice. "I will get away early in the morning."

The pitiful quivering face she raised as she uttered the words would have touched a heart of marble. Mrs. Venn had a hard struggle with herself to prevent giving way to tears, and the longing was strong upon her to fall on her knees beside the couch, take the girl in her strong arms, and cry out that she would trust her blindly. But her pride rebelled. No, she must not give way; Annie was guilty, and she must never encourage guilt.

"There is just one thing I would ask,"

murmured Annie, in a quivering voice, as she turned away.

"What is that?" slowly asked Mrs. Venn. "If you would be so kind, I—I would like to see Harry—just one moment, to—to thank him for—risking his life—to—to save my valueless one," faltered she, piteously.

"I will tell him," returned his mother, not unkindly, as she turned away.

But she took with her a memory as she walked out of that room that haunted her while her life lasted—the memory of that beautiful white face turned so piteously toward her, and the big, solemn blue eyes from which the tears were coursing in great drops down the wan cheeks and falling on the clasped hands.

Some time elapsed after she quitted the room ere Annie began to vaguely wonder why Harry did not respond to her message.

There was no one to tell her that the servant had not understood Mr. Venn to say that he was to return to the sick girl with a reply, although his master had distinctly said so; therefore Annie waited and waited in vain for his coming.

Nor did the French girl Mrs. Venn had spoken of make her appearance.

"They all wish to let me see how completely they are going to ignore me on the morrow," sobbed the poor girl, wretchedly. "I—I will not trouble them by remaining under their roof overnight."

A footstep sounded in the corridor outside. Annie started up with a little gasp.

She had sent for Harry to thank him for saving her life; but now, as the moment of meeting him face to face drew near, she grew greatly agitated.

The footstep, however, passed by her door, dying away at the lower end of the corridor.

"He will not come," she sobbed again.

At that moment her eyes fell upon a carte de visite on the mantel.

Annie saw that it was Harry's, and weak as she was she rose from her couch and crept over to it, took it from the ebony easel on which it rested into her little wan hands, and covered it with passionate, despairing kisses.

There was no one save the listening angels, who saw and heard all, that knew how she wept over it, calling it every endearing name.

"Oh, beautiful eyes that have never looked love into mine!" she moaned, piteously, "oh, strong arms that have never clasped me, and yet for one brief while you were—my husband!" she cried, kissing the portrait.

Over and over she repeated the words "my husband" as though they were the sweetest music to her famished ears, and as she spoke them a glad light almost seemed to come into the earnest eyes regarding her with an almost lifelike expression.

She attempted to replace the picture, but it seemed to her almost like tearing her heart out by the roots.

"Ah! if I might but keep it," she told herself, wistfully. "He was once my husband, and I love him better than life itself, and—and Heaven help me, I love him still, even though he belongs to another! For his sake I have spared my mortal foe, because in striking at her it would have pierced his heart first."

How different she had found life from the rosy day-dreams she had had of love and happiness with Harry Venn as his wife. She had hoped for it with all her soul—prayed for it as the one prayer of her life. She had made for herself an idol, but found it only common clay. She was sorry for the ending of the only bright ray of joyous light that had ever shone across her desolate path. Even in that hour, as she gazed with her whole heart in her eyes, she thought of lines she had read and wept over but a short time before.

Heaven help her, how truly they applied to her own pitiful case!

"And this is all! The end has come at last!

The bitter end of all that pleasant dream

That cast a halo o'er the happy past

Like golden sunshine on a summer's stream.

Sweet were the dreams that marked life's sunny slope

When we together drew our hearts apace,
And through the vision of a future hope
I did not dream that they would pass so soon.

In happy mood fair castles I upreared,
And thought that life was one long summer day;

I had no dread of future pain, nor feared
That shadows e'er should fall athwart our way.

But sunken rocks lie hid in every stream,
And ships are wrecked when just in sight of land;

So I to-day wake from the pleasant dream
To find my hopes were builded on the sand.

I do not blame you that you did not keep
The troth you plighted ere your heart you knew;

Better the parting now than wake to weep
When time has robbed life's roses of their dew.

Another face has helped you to forget

The idle dream that had its birth in trust,
And other lips will kiss away regret

And broken faith and idols turned to dust.

Ab, well! you chose perhaps the better way;

Another love now in your heart is shrine!

And I—I shall go down my darkened way,
Seeking for ever what I ne'er shall find!"

Beautiful, despairing words, but oh, how pitifully true! They seemed to Annie to almost have been written by some one who knew of her and of her sorrow.

"I must go," she told herself, pathetically; but it was easier to say than accomplish, for ere she took the first step forward she fell down in a little white heap on the floor, with the picture clasped close to her heart in her stiff fingers.

And there, Coralie, the new maid, found her. She was too frightened at the lapse of time she had spent gossiping in the servants' hall, to the utter neglect of her charge, to make any outcry about finding the unconscious girl lying there, but set about restoring her at once.

And it occurred to her how strange it was that this beautiful stranger should swoon, holding her handsome young master's picture so closely to her heart.

Coralie worked faithfully over her charge an hour or more, and she was thankful enough to see the lovely blue eyes open, then almost immediately close again in a deep sleep.

The maid sat down by the bedside, and she wondered why she, too, felt unusually drowsy, even though the hands of the bronze clock on the mantel only pointed to eleven.

There seemed to be a heavy, sweet, subtle odour in the room.

While she was wondering about it, despite her every effort at wakefulness, sleep gently closed her eyelids, and she fell into a comatose state after a few gasping, yawning breaths.

Slowly, like a death-knell, the clock on the mantel struck the hour of twelve, and then, slowly and cautiously the velvet portières opened, and a woman slid like a shadow into the darkened room, her velvet-shod feet making no sound on the thick carpet.

With swift footsteps she crossed the room, bending over the sleeping nurse, and intently scanning her face.

The light shone full upon her as she bent thus—revealing the dark satanic face of Ethel.

Satisfying herself that the woman really slept, Ethel crossed over quickly to the couch on which Annie lay, still and white like a beautiful image carved in marble; but the beauty of the white face, crowned in its halo of pale-gold hair lying against the no whiter pillow, brought not one thrill of pity to the heart of the woman bending breathlessly over her.

"Twice a fate almost as strange as a miracle has kept you from the vengeance I would have meted out to you," muttered

Ethel, with demoniac hatred blazing in her black eyes, "but you shall never escape me a third time. You shall never live to see to-morrow's light and tell the story of my sins to Harry. It was a life-and-death struggle between you and me from the very first as to which would win him, and I am victorious! You shall never usurp my place! You shall never live to tell him the story of the Black Pool, and of how I enticed you into the tower! I meant to go away and leave you in the tower, but a thousand demons tempted me to set fire to the place and destroy all evidence of what I had done! But fate balked me. I repeat that it never shall a third time. You are once again in my power, and this time you cannot escape. You may well sigh and tremble in your sleep, for your last hour has come!"

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE great tear-drops on the long lashes and the woful expression of the pale face of poor sleeping Annie brought no throb of pity to Ethel's heart as she bent over her.

"Despite all she has passed through, Annie is more beautiful than ever," she muttered, knitting her brows together in a dark frown. "Ah, no! Harry must not see her!"

At that moment Annie stirred uneasily on her pillow, and the blue eyes slowly opened, but before she could utter the terrified cry that rose to her lips Ethel's hand came down quickly over her mouth.

"Do not attempt to cry out or utter any sound!" she hissed, "for it will be quite useless. You could not arouse the woman who sits beside the couch, for she is in a deep lethargic sleep. You see you are wholly in my power, and must listen to me!"

She read a world of fear and despair in the eyes raised so beseechingly to her own.

"Your last hour has come!" she cried. "Twice before I made up my mind to that effect, but you escaped me. This time I shall not fail!"

With almost superhuman strength Annie tore Ethel's hand from her mouth.

"Why should you wish my poor life?" she sobbed, pantingly. "Is it not enough that you have won the love of my husband from me, separated us, and wedded him yourself? You have taken from me all that made life worth the living—wrecked all my future. Let that suffice, and may Heaven find pardon for you for what you have already done!"

"Why should I wish to rid myself of you—get you out of my path for all time? How strange that you should ask that. Don't you suppose I see through your designs in persistently throwing yourself in Harry's way with the hope of winning him back? I have sworn that this you shall never do—at any cost. The waters of the Black Pool cast you up, and the fire failed to consume you, but this time I shall do the work more skillfully!"

"Are you woman or fiend?" exclaimed Annie, in horror. "Think what the world would say if I were to breathe the horrible story that it was your hand that set fire to The Fire, and—"

"No one would believe you, no matter how vehemently you asserted that," cut in Ethel, triumphantly and coolly. "But, all the same, I shall not leave it in your power to do so. Do you see this vial?" and she held up a small, narrow bottle toward the dim light. "Let me tell you what is in it," she went on, in a voice so mocking that it made the blood run cold in the girl's veins. "It is a French cordial that the maid Powers obtained for me. Five drops of it will produce sleep, twenty produces paralysis, and less than thirty insanity or death! It leaves no trace behind. You sent for Harry. Well, when he comes he will find you lying here cold in death—your lips sealed for ever. They will never repeat the story of what happened at the Black Pool, or that it was my hand that set fire to The Fire!"

Annie tried to spring from the couch, and to utter a piercing cry for help; but the power to move or to utter even the faintest moan seemed to have left her.

"Have Heaven and the angels forgotten me?" was the silent, agonised cry that shot through her heart and brain; and in that instant she felt the vial pressed close to her lips, a fiery liquid burn and parch them, and a shock like an electric spark flash through her whole body.

Annie made a violent effort to raise herself from the pillow, and partially succeeded, the action causing the thin vial to break, scattering its burning contents on her chin and throat.

She was conscious that Ethel uttered a startled, baffled cry as she sprang forward to gather up the fragments of glass, and in that moment there was the sound of heavy footfalls along the passage-way without, and they halted at the door.

There was a low, cautious tap, certainly not in accordance with the heavy, strampling feet.

She saw Ethel turn and fly through the opposite door, and the portières had barely closed after her ere the door which opened out into the passage-way was flung open, and three men, wearing officers' garb, filed into the apartment, followed by Mr. Whiteley. And again Annie made an almost Herculean effort to shriek out, but could utter no sound; neither could she move hand or foot to have saved life itself, and in that moment the appalling truth burst upon her benumbed brain that the terror she had passed through within the last half-hour had paralysed her!

Annie lay like one dead, gazing straight before her with wide-open eyes, seeing, hearing, but incapable of even the slightest, faintest motion.

The man who had preceded the party, catching the stony glance of the dilated eyes fixed full upon him, hesitatingly approached the couch on which she lay, twirling his hat nervously in his hands as he advanced.

"Believe me," he said, earnestly, "this is the gravest and by far the hardest duty that I have ever been my lot to perform. I have a warrant for your arrest on the charge of arson—setting fire to The Fire—the villa which has been burned to the ground!"

To his utter amazement no cry, no moan, broke from the girl's white lips.

"Do you realise—do you understand?" he questioned, in an earnest, troubled voice, bending nearer her.

There was still no response, only the same uncertain stare from the glazed, uplifted eyes.

"Good Heaven!" cried the officer, reeling backward, a cold perspiration breaking over his face, "the girl is dead!"

Mr. Whiteley, who was standing a few feet away, soundly berating the nurse for falling asleep and neglecting her charge, came quickly forward, as did the others, who had hung back near the door, awaiting orders from their chief.

"Dead!" hoarsely echoed Mr. Whiteley.

In an instant they had all gathered around Annie, bending breathlessly over her.

"No, this is not death," returned one, who had placed his ear close to the girl's heart. "There is a faint fluttering pulsation here. It is a case partly of paralysis, partly of apoplexy, and decidedly dangerous."

"Summon a doctor!" cried Mr. Whiteley. "The girl is shamming!"

"The gentleman who has just given his opinion is the medical adviser of the staff," returned the man to whom the lawyer had addressed his command. "Doctor Bryant is the best authority."

"Well, what do you propose to do?" inquired Mr. Whiteley, looking from one to the other.

It was Doctor Bryant who answered,—"We must place the girl under arrest, allowing her to remain where she is. To remove her would be absolutely dangerous at present."

"How long do you think it will be before she can be removed?" asked the lawyer, assuming a careless indifference he was far from feeling.

"If there is no change for the better within forty-eight hours death will remove her," returned the doctor, abruptly and very gravely.

"We will leave an officer here," he continued, "as it is customary to do in such cases; and when I come to-morrow morning I will bring with me a competent nurse."

Mr. Whiteley bowed assent, and they took their leave, one of their number being detailed to patrol the corridor outside of Annie's room.

The errand of the officers caused the greatest excitement in the household.

Mrs. Whiteley hurried to her daughter's room at once when she heard the story from her husband, and related it breathlessly to Ethel and Harry.

"So it was she who set fire to The Fire, was it?" cried Ethel, excitedly. "I knew it. I suspected her at once, mamma."

Harry had risen from his chair, and stood there like an image carved in marble—he was so deathly pale.

"Hush! I cannot—I will not believe anything of the kind. I would as soon think an angel from Heaven set fire to The Fire as that poor sweet, innocent little Annie did it!"

He threw off his dressing-gown and reached hastily for his coat as he spoke.

"What are you going to do?" cried Ethel, springing from her seat and clinging to his arm.

"I am going to look into this matter—investigate it from beginning to end," he retorted hoarsely. "No one must dare accuse Annie of such a crime! I should have gone to her when she sent for me despite your whims, for she is lying there ill unto death. I am man enough to do everything in my power to assist her. Go with me to her, or stay, as you please, Ethel."

"I will go with you to see her," said Ethel, knowing that he would go, and that no power on earth could prevent him. "Will you accompany us, mamma?"

Mrs. Whiteley was wise enough to decline, and Ethel followed her husband in silence, and together they entered Annie's apartment.

Harry was quite overcome when he approached the couch, and saw the marble, white face lying against the pillow.

At the first instantaneous glance he, too, thought the girl was dead, and, all unmindful of Ethel's presence, he bowed his fair, handsome face in his hands, and wept tears such as strong men weep but once in a life time.

"Does Annie realise all that is transpiring around her, or is she unconscious?" was the question that Ethel asked herself with bitter hatred and jealousy as she stood by.

"You might have spared me this evidence of your love for the girl," she declared bitterly, at length. "You seem to have quite forgotten my presence."

"You must find pardon for me, Ethel," he said, huskily. "I realise that my conduct must be displeasing to you. I meant to forbear—Heaven knows I did—but thoughts of the past overcame me. Poor little Annie! Remember, Ethel, she was my wife, though in name only, and I learned how much I loved her when it was too late!"

"Any other man with spirit would have abhorred the girl!" cried Ethel, tremulous with rage. "Why, her last sin is simply horrible. What clemency, what mercy should be extended to a woman who attempted to burn us alive in our beds?"

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

HARRY VENN turned and faced his young wife with a darkening brow.

"I refuse to believe in Annie's guilt," he said, huskily.

A sneer curled Ethel's white lips.

"Perhaps you can explain how she came to be in the tower that night," she said, sharply.

"Not one of the servants knows how she gained an entrance there."

"I cannot tell—I can form no idea," he said, sadly.

"What brought her to The Fire?" Ethel went on, excitedly.

Harry bowed his troubled face on his hands, and uttered a deep sigh that was almost a groan.

"She crept into the house like a thief in the night, intent upon revenge upon you and me!" pursued Ethel, shrilly. "She came there to carry out the most diabolical scheme that ever entered a woman's brain—to burn down the roof over our heads, and—she succeeded."

"I have faith that she will be able to explain satisfactorily what brought her to The Fire," he answered, slowly. "She knows as little about the origin of the fire as you or I."

"It is not often a man champions the cause of an avowed foe," cried Ethel, in exasperation.

"I am pained to hear you express yourself in that manner," returned Harry, sternly. "Annie has too noble and tender a heart to be a foe to a cruel enemy, even if she had one."

"It is a great pity that you freed yourself from her if you had such an exalted opinion of her," cried Ethel, trembling with suppressed rage.

"I own that I regretted the action almost immediately," retorted Harry bitterly. "It was the one terrible mistake of my life."

But quite as soon as the words were spoken, and he noted the pain they inflicted upon Ethel, he regretted having uttered them.

"Forgive me," he said hoarsely. "You forced me to tell you the truth!"

Ethel drew her slender form up to the fullest height and looked at him.

"That girl came between you and me, and she has made life bitter enough for me," she cried, "and when I see her lying here I say to myself, 'It is but a just vengeance visited upon her.' If she dies I would not shed one tear of pity for her; if she lives, and is sent to prison, I would not lift my hand to save her were it in my power!"

"Heaven forbid that you should be so heartless, Ethel," cried Harry, drawing back, and looking at her aghast. "Why, I would give every penny I possess in the world to clear her fair name of that atrocious crime of which she, an innocent girl, stands charged. I shall secure the best of counsel for her that money can procure, and sift this—"

"Stop!" Ethel said, sharply. "Your forewarning me has forewarned me. Not one shilling of your wealth shall go to help the girl who deliberately attempted to burn the roof over our heads! You may as well understand first as last that I have something to say about that matter!"

"I decline to discuss the affair further, and let this settle the argument. I shall invest my money as I see fit," returned Harry, haughtily; adding, "I shall see that little Annie has justice shown her if it takes my last guinea."

He never forgot the horrible laugh that broke from Ethel's lips.

"Then you would have very little to expend ere you reached your last guinea," she returned. "I may as well tell you a strange secret here and now, which will put quite a different face upon your plans of generosity. You would find it out soon, anyhow, and it is this: You are not the millionaire you take yourself to be, Harry Venn!"

He looked at her as though he thought she had suddenly lost her reason, but vouchsafed no reply.

(To be continued.)

THE most notable attraction in a mosque at Delhi is a single red hair, which is said to have been plucked from the moustache of Mahomet. It is kept under glass, and visitors are permitted to look at it on payment of a sum equal to about twenty five cents.

A TERRIBLE ORDEAL.

—O—

CHAPTER XVII.

MURIEL SINCLAIR felt as if a great piece of good fortune had befallen her in her chance meeting with the Campbells.

Of a loyal, faithful nature, with Muriel to love once was to love always, and just as in the old days of her brief stay at school, the little half pupil had clung with almost reverential affection to the bright, handsome girl two years her senior, so now the little daily governess was disposed to look up to and admire the sweet-faced girl, who bore her reverses so bravely.

To have a friend was the greatest boon to poor Muriel. Plenty of people were kind to her, but she was not on really equal terms with any one of them.

During the last few months Mrs. Netherton had really shown a friendly interest in the governess; but besides being twenty years older, her rank and surroundings were so different from Muriel's that the girl's confidences would have been impossible for her to understand, even had the latter gathered courage to make them.

Mrs. Payne was younger and less unapproachable; but Mrs. Payne also was wealthy, and knew absolutely nothing of the shifts of genteel poverty.

Two or three girls of her own age, whom Miss Sinclair knew slightly, always seemed so wrapped up in their own concerns that Muriel had never felt much drawn towards them.

Her mother, though kind, was too weak in character, and too low-spirited to be a real companion to the girl. Many and many a time Muriel had longed for a real friend; and now, when perhaps she needed one more than she had ever done before, Jessie came to live in Dornington.

Little Miss Sinclair remained to tea, and was introduced to Mrs. Campbell and Kate, besides the five children.

The gentle widow received her daughter's old schoolfellow very kindly, and eighteen-year-old Katy was delighted actually to have a visitor at last.

"I think the worst of coming here and being poor is that we haven't a single friend. Do you know, Miss Sinclair, that you are the first person who has ever been inside the house?"

"I am so glad to come!"

"It's worse for Jessie than for us," said Kate, when her sister had gone to help their mother put on her cap. "She was engaged to the very nicest man you can think of, and just before father died he had to go abroad on business, and he may be away for years. His people are very well off, and they wanted Jessie to go and live with them till Paul came back, but she wouldn't leave mother. She is the brightest, dearest sister in the world, and yet, somehow, one feels she never forgets. I know she misses Paul always."

After tea, when the children had been put to bed, and it was getting late, Jessie solved a problem which had been troubling Muriel dreadfully.

The poor child was actually afraid to start on her return home, lest she should meet her persecutor. True, Roger Baldwin had been engaged to spend the evening in Paragon-street, but Muriel was by no means sure he would not change his plans.

"Mother," said Jessie, brightly, "if you don't mind being alone for half an hour Kate and I will walk home with Muriel."

"Very well, dear!" returned Mrs. Campbell, "wrap yourselves up, for it is very cold."

So the three girls walked cheerfully to Paragon-street, and before they reached the Herberts' house Muriel had promised Jessie to come and see her again very soon.

"There are so many of us that someone is sure to be at home," said Jessie, kindly, "and you must not wait until you have plenty of

time. Just pop in for ten minutes as soon as you can; it will cheer me and Katy, for I can tell you we both fret a great deal at not finding pupils."

Muriel put her latch-key in the lock with a strange fluttering at her heart. Would her persecutor be still in the house, and if so could she escape to bed without Mr. Herbert trying to force her to meet his guest? Would Roger Baldwin have given his own version of their meeting, and made her family yet more discontented with her?

To her surprise an unwonted stillness reigned over the house. She listened, and could hear no sound of voices. She was just thinking of venturing downstairs to see if her mother was alone, when Mr. Gibson's door opened, and she found herself face to face with the classical tutor.

"I have been entrusted with a message to you, Miss Sinclair. Your mother has gone out with Mr. Herbert to spend the evening, and you are not to trouble to sit up for them."

Muriel looked incredulous.

"Mother has not been out to spend the evening since I can remember. Oh, Mr. Gibson, are you deceiving me? Is there some fresh trouble threatening us?"

He held open the door of his sitting-room.

"Will you not come in and rest by the fire a little? I will tell you all I know. I don't think there is any need for you to be alarmed about your mother. She came in herself to give me the message, and she looked very bright."

"But where is Betsy?"

"Betsy was solemnly ordered not to leave the nursery on any excuse whatever. In fact, I was appointed custodian, and undertook to answer all the knocks. None came, however."

"And mamma?"

Mr. Gibson looked thoughtful.

"Do you remember a warning I gave you not long ago, Miss Sinclair?"

"Perfectly. The last time he came I never saw him at all. I went out to-night only because I understood he was going to be here."

"He never came." It was curious to notice how both spoke of Mr. Baldwin simply by the vague pronoun "he," and how perfectly each understood. "I believe he sent a note, asking Mr. Herbert to reverse the arrangement, and bring your mother to supper at his house."

"Mother could never walk there."

"He sent a fly for her. The only thing which surprised me in the affair was that you were not included in the invitation, Miss Sinclair. Muriel, what is the matter?" for the poor child's self-command had given way, and the tears were rolling down her cheeks.

"It is terrible!" she murmured. "Poor mother does so love to be comfortable, and to have pretty things about her. If she sees his house, and it is as grand as she expects, she will never forgive me."

Robert Gibson tried to comfort her.

"Baldwin is not a nice companion for any woman, but I think Mrs. Herbert cannot get much harm from spending one evening at his house."

"You don't understand," and poor Muriel hid her crimson face. "I love my mother dearly, Mr. Gibson, but we are not alike. Her idea of happiness is to have plenty of money, so that the children may be well-cared for. She thinks no one with money can feel trouble."

He took her hand in his.

"I understand. You are afraid when once she has seen Mr. Baldwin's luxurious house she will believe it possible that you could be happy there?"

"Oh! what have I said?" cried Muriel, in an agony of confusion. "You must despise me."

"I could not, and indeed, you have said nothing. Your distress has implied that a fear Mr. Payne mentioned may not be quite groundless. He is very much interested in

you, Miss Sinclair, and I know he is troubled with the notion that Mr. Baldwin covets your hand, so that a refused, graceful wife may open the doors of society, which now refuses to know him."

"Mr. Payne said that?"

"Well, it seems he knows a good deal about the rich man's antecedents. He says Mr. Baldwin will never try to marry any girl who has a father or brother to make awkward inquiries into his past. And then, you know, it has puzzled a good many people that the master of the Place should suddenly engage a private secretary. He can have nothing for one to do, since the bulk of his correspondence is on subjects of such a confidential nature he could not entrust it to a stranger."

"We thought perhaps his education had been neglected."

"His business education is a very thorough one. No, Miss Sinclair. I am afraid his acquaintance with Mr. Herbert has but one object in view."

She buried her face in her hands.

"You are right. He—Mr. Herbert—spoke to me to day, and said if I played my cards well I should be mistress of the Place. And then he made mother talk to me, and keep telling me all I could do for the children it—oh! Mr. Gibson is too dreadful!"

"But Mrs. Herbert will be on your side."

Muriel shook her head.

"She loves me, but she loves the little ones more; besides, she would think she was persuading me for my own advantage."

"We can only hope we are mistaken," said Gibson, gently. "Self-made men are often easily affronted. If you try hard, surely you will succeed in offending Mr. Baldwin!"

"If it were not for the children I would go away," said Muriel, wearily. "Mrs. Nether-ton is very kind, and she knows a great many people. I think she would find me a situation as resident governess if I asked her."

There was a strange silence in the little room. Muriel looked up and saw the classical tutor watching her with a strange, grave tenderness.

He had removed his spectacles, and the beauty of his grey-blue eyes was almost wistful in its intensity. Muriel felt strangely ill at ease. By a desperate effort she forced herself to break the silence.

"Don't you think it would be best for me to go away, Mr. Gibson?" she asked, gently.

"Don't tempt me," he answered, with something like a groan. "I dare not advise you. I cannot bid you stay, and yet to tell you to go is beyond my strength, since I have learned to love you with all the strength of my heart."

"Do not be angry," he continued, sadly. "You shall never hear of my love again. I, at least will cease you no distress or suffering. I had meant to bury my secret in my own heart, but your asking my advice broke down my self-control. This man's presumption has been as torture to me. Knowing his character it has been almost agony to me to think that he should have dared lift his eyes to my pure filly, my gentle friend, the girl I would so fain have made my wife."

"You need not think that," said Muriel, earnestly. "I could not marry him. It would seem to me worse than death."

Her heart beat quickly. She had been unconscious of her own secret—had fancied the only regarded Robert Gibson as a friend and teacher; but to-night the truth dawned on her.

She knew she loved him as she should never love again. Just as he cared for her she cared for him, and yet he spoke of his love as hopeless, as something he would fain keep from her.

"I know I can never wed you myself," said the young man, passionately. "I know that between you and me there is a great gulf fixed which I dare not try to cross. I must expect to see another receive the love I dare not ask for; but, at least, it would be easier to give you up to one more worthy of you one

who would cherish you as tenderly as I would fain have done."

She could not offer him the love he said he dared not ask for. She could not tell him no barrier was too great for her affection to conquer; but one thing she could say to him, and she did.

"You will never have to see that," came slowly from the girl's trembling lips. "No one will win me, for I never mean to marry."

"Muriel!"

Was it something in her words or in the hesitation of her voice that had told him her secret? Was it possible that she might have been his after all—that but for the dark secret in his life he might have won his first and only love?

"Muriel!"

He staggered towards her with the halting, uncertain step almost of a blind man. He took her hand in his, and looked tenderly, yet searchingly, into her sweet face.

"My darling!" he cried, passionately. "I love you. With you at my side I think I should be strong to face all earthly trials. I love you so well, Muriel, that it is a joy to me just to live near you and hear your voice; but, child, I dare not ask you to be my wife, I dare not link your future with my dreary one!"

"Don't you think," said the girl, wistfully, "my future is dreary too?"

"No, because, at least, it is unshadowed by remorse. Muriel, my darling, I am as unworthy of you as that wretched Baldwin. Child, there is the stain of blood-guiltiness on my soul. A human life will be required at my hands!"

It was a terrible revelation for any girl to hear. He expected her to shrink from him in loathing, perhaps to leave the room, certainly to snatch away the hand he held; instead of which Muriel's sweet face met his as confidently as before, and when she spoke her voice was full of sympathy.

"I don't believe you are a murderer. You could not be one, and lead the life you do. I have heard of accidents that caused death before now. There was a girl at our school who, in playing with a loaded gun, killed her little brother, but you could not call her a murderer?"

"But I was not a child, Muriel."

"It is that which makes you sad," observed the girl, thoughtfully. "You have come to this place to hide yourself from all your old friends, to begin a new life, and you have been miserable."

"I have not been miserable lately. I thought for a little while that my remorse had blotted out the crime. I fancied that, by trying hard to do my best to help my fellow-creatures, I might expiate that one dark deed. I have tried. Oh, Muriel! I cannot tell you how hard the struggle has been, and now, of what avail is it? I am a murderer! I dare not make for myself a home and ties such as other men have! Loving you as I do, how can I ask you to be my wife, when at any time I might be taken from you—to prison and to death?"

But still no shadow of repugnance came to Muriel. Still her innocent hand rested in that bloodstained one. Looking up fearlessly into his face she said,—

"I wish you would tell me all about it!"

"Why?"

"Because I am sure you are making it seem a great deal worse than it really is! When one never speaks of a thing, but keeps brooding and brooding over it to one's self, one can't help exaggerating it. You say you love me. Then trust me with your secret."

He obeyed her.

"It was no premeditated act—no planned wrong. That is all I can urge in extenuation."

"It was at a party. I had danced three times with his fiancée, but I had no more meant to vex him than I dreamed of the consequences that would come. It was an intensely hot night, and tired of the gaiety and merriment around me I had gone down to

the riverside to breathe a little fresh air. He met me there, and suddenly struck me full in the face!"

"I demanded an explanation, and he accused me of trying to steal the affections of his betrothed. I protested my innocence, he would not believe me, and answered with cruel taunts. One of them was so exasperating that I lost my patience, and felled him to the ground."

"Muriel, as Heaven is my witness, I never meant to kill him. His head must have struck against something hard in the fall—he was quite dead!"

"And you left him?"

"I escaped. I have regretted my flight a hundred times. If I had only stayed and given myself up to justice, bearing the punishment of my crime, it might have eased my remorse, but I had parents and sisters. I could not bear the idea of bringing disgrace on them, and so I fled."

"And you went to Germany, and gave yourself up to teaching, becoming so famous that the professors there recommended you to Dr. Nether-ton?"

"I came here thinking Dornington a safe hiding place. I tried to throw myself into my work, but at first the struggle nearly killed me."

"Mrs. Nether-ton told me once you had been engaged, and that it was broken off. She thought that was why you were so unhappy. The doctor always fancied you never got over the shock of the railway accident."

"And you?" he asked, gravely. "What did my Muriel think?"

"I always felt you had some heavy trouble, and I longed to comfort you!"

"My darling!"

She rose to go, the tears yet wet upon her cheek. Mr. Gibson said eagerly,—

"Muriel, you will not forsake me utterly? You will let us be friends until you give some one else the prize that dare not ask for you. Understand, sweetheart, all that is left for me to do in atonement for the past is to abstain from all earthly ties!"

"I understand."

"And you will let us be friends?"

"Friends always," she whispered, brokenly.

"Nothing you can say will ever make me believe anything against you. I shall trust you always—in life and death."

A thundering knock at the door. Muriel rushed to open it, forgetting she was still in her hat and jacket, and that her eyes were not quite dry. Mr. Herbert greeted her with a sharp reprimand.

"Eleven o'clock," he said, angrily, "and you have only just come home! I won't have such goings on in my house, young lady."

Robert Gibson heard through the half-open door, and longed to box the speaker's ears. Mrs. Herbert's greeting to her daughter, was even less to his taste.

"Such a splendid house, Muriel, and Mr. Baldwin does the honours of it beautifully. He is quite a different man in his own home. Ah, his wife will be a lucky woman!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

"AFTER a storm there comes a calm," is a time-honoured maxim, and so far as the inhabitants of the dingy house in Paragon-street were concerned it certainly seemed to be fulfilled.

Mr. Baldwin's visits, which had been the cause of so much strife, were abruptly discontinued. Mr. Herbert left off talking of his patron's wealth, and his wife (perhaps at a hint from him) ceased to sing the rich man's praises to her daughter.

Roger Baldwin's name dropped quite out of conversation in the Herbert's family circle; and though the unappreciated author continued to act as his private secretary, Muriel honestly believed that her scornful reception of his advances had had the desired effect, and that for the future she should be free of him.

It was a very happy spring and early summer for Muriel. The love that filled her heart seemed to gild her whole life. True, Mr. Gibson never spoke of his attachment again, but she was quite content with his grave, gentle kindness, his eagerness to spare her any trouble. The softening of his voice, the brightening of his eye when he spoke to her, all told Muriel his love endured, though he denied himself the expression of it.

He had told her he could never have a home—or wife—that for all time his life must be a lonely one—that only by abstaining from all earthly joys could he hope to atone for that one rash deed; but yet Muriel was content.

At twenty she did not look forward into the far distant future. She loved him just as he loved her. She would far rather be his "friend" than another man's wife.

Meanwhile she saw him every day. She could look after his comfort in all things; she trusted him entirely, and so far from suffering the pang of a "hopeless attachment," Muriel's whole nature seemed gladdened by sunshine since she had learnt Robert Gibson's affection.

Nothing in all the world can be more painful to a girl or woman than a long indefinite engagement—to have friends and acquaintances inquiring at stated intervals when "it" is to be—to have father and mother, perhaps, thinking the lover delirious in naming the day. This is pain indeed.

But for a young girl to love and cherish a man whom she sees daily, and who loves her truly though he speaks no word of it, for the two each to know they are dearest on earth to the other, though no one else suspects it, is a happiness far surpassing that of an openly-announced engagement.

If she had been older and more worldly-wise Muriel might have asked herself "What was to come of it?" Had she been a wealthy young lady, with no duties to occupy her time, she might have wished for the glory and importance of being a *fiancée*. As it was she was perfectly content.

Not so the classical tutor. Older and more experienced than Muriel, he knew the strange understanding between them could not last. In justice to Muriel it must not. She ought not to waste the best years of her life waiting for a man who had given himself to a celibate's life.

Either he must bury his own scruples and risk a married man's responsibilities, trusting to the dead past to bury its dead, or he must leave Paragon-street, and break off all intimacy with the Herberts.

Which was it to be? Poor fellow! He asked himself the question daily, and grew no nearer to a decision. If only her home had been a happier one. If only he could have felt her parents to be trustworthy, he would have left her; but, alas! his eyes, sharpened by love, saw pretty plainly that Mrs. Herbert was but a tool in her husband's hands, that the needy author worshipped money, and would sacrifice his step-daughter readily to the highest bidder.

Alfred Payne, meeting Mr. Gibson one evening in early May, stopped to inquire after the family in Paragon-street, and whether his warning against Roger Baldwin had been of any use.

"He came twice rather close together, but he has not been in the house since February, and they have ceased to ring his praises."

"That sounds well, but Herbert is still hand-and-glove with him, I suppose?"

"He is still his private secretary."

"Or boon companion; that's what it means, I fancy. I was driving past the Place yesterday, and I saw quite a number of workmen there. He is building a billiard room and a conservatory. I should not have thought him a man to appreciate flowers."

"Perhaps he has found a bride, and the conservatory is in her honour."

They parted cordially, and Gibson went home. The little house in Paragon-street boasted quite a large back garden, and the lodger was aiding the elder children in its

cultivation. To his surprise, he found to-night several dozen of bedding plants waiting to be put in.

"Father bought them," said Alice, capering about. "Aren't they lovely? And they are paid for," in a precocious, childlike whisper, "for Muriel asked the man before she took them in."

Muriel, who had come out to superintend the twins, blushed hotly.

"I did not know Mr. Herbert cared for flowers," observed the lodger, as he set to work.

"He does not," returned Muriel, in a low voice. "I cannot understand it at all."

"You are sure they are his present?"

"Quite sure," and she coloured, for she understood the allusion. "I know the boy who brought them belongs to the florist's at Little Dornington."

They planted the flowers not without a little surprise at their number and choice. Then Robert Gibson inquired for Mrs. Herbert.

"She has gone for a drive with papa," explained Alice, "in such a pretty carriage!"

The two seniors of the party exchanged glances, and as soon as the children were out of earshot, Muriel said, anxiously,—

"I cannot understand it, but papa seems a great deal better off than usual. He bought mamma and the children new dresses yesterday, and this is the third time he has taken her out in the pony-carriage. Now, I know the things must be paid for, for no one will give him credit."

"But surely if they are paid for you have nothing to be anxious about? It is good news that Mr. Herbert should have more money, and spend it on his house."

Muriel shook her head.

"You don't understand. If he had sold one of his stories he would have told us. He is always so proud and pleased he couldn't keep it to himself. I daresay it is horrid of me, but I can't help wondering where he got the money."

"Come, Muriel," said her lover, with a smile, "you can't really suspect Mr. Herbert of robbing a bank or running off with a shop till? Be easy. Perhaps some of his relations have sent him a present."

"He has no relations," said Muriel, frankly, "neither has mother. It seems so strange that we should have no one belonging to us outside our own house."

"And you? Have you no relations?"

"I—"

"Don't you see, you might have relations on your own father's side who would be no connection to your mother or the Herberts."

"Oh, I daresay I have dozens," said Muriel. "My own father was an artist, and his family cast him off when he married mother. I think they were poor, and wanted him to find a rich wife."

"I suppose you cannot remember him?"

"He died before I could speak. Mother says he was very good and brave, and I think she loved him, though it seems hard to believe it, as she married Mr. Herbert."

"Then you don't believe in second marriages?"

"I don't believe in second love. If two people had cared for each other very dearly, and through someone making mischief they were parted, then if a few years later they met again, and the man was a widower, I don't see why they should not marry. I don't believe any brave, true woman would marry twice."

"You forget your mother."

"But mamma is not brave," said Muriel. "She would be miserable if she felt alone in the world."

"It is a desolate sensation."

"It is better to be alone if one cannot find one's ideal than to lower one's standard—I think."

They were drifting to painful subjects, and it was a relief to both when the little servant came on to say a young lady was asking to see Miss Sinclair.

"I did not know you boasted a confidential

friend?" said Gibson, half carelessly, as he played with his golden brown beard.

He had grown it during the previous winter, saying it protected his throat; but Dr. Nether-ton laughed at the precaution, and told him it made him look a good ten years' older, and that with beard and spectacles he would pass for forty any day.

"She is a schoolfellow, and they have only lately come to settle in Dornington. I should like you to see her!"

He followed her indoors, and Muriel presented them to each other.

"Jessie, this is my friend Mr. Gibson. Mr. Gibson, this is my schoolfellow!"

From some mistake—perhaps from inexperience, since she was not used to making introductions—she quite forgot to mention the young lady's surname at all.

Robert Gibson looked a little critically at the visitor. He was a little anxious to see the style of person Muriel would choose as a friend. He was quite satisfied with the slight, black-robed figure, whose quiet, self-possession pleased him.

For a moment he fancied there was something familiar in the sweet, thoughtful face; then he dismissed the idea as absurd.

"I believe I am getting morbid. Miss Campbell was sparkling, coquettish creature, who looked like a laughing child. This girl must be five or six-and-twenty, and is as demure as a cloistered nun!"

Jessie Campbell had heard Mr. Gibson's name mentioned quite often enough to decide in her own mind he possessed a large share of Muriel's thoughts, and she was very glad to see him and have the chance of judging for herself how far he was worthy of her little friend.

Her impression was distinctly favourable; but what a pity it was he was obliged to wear spectacles! His face was such a noble type. His brow was so open and dignified she would have liked to see his eyes, and if he must wear spectacles why must he choose such hideous blue-glass ones—just the kind which, in their childish days, she and her sisters had called goggles.

But goggles or not he was a gentleman. Jessie could see that, and his income being fair (according to her later experience), in spite of the glasses; and his many years of seniority (she took him for "double Muriel's age"), she was quite willing to approve of the engagement, but it did not seem to Jessie nearly such a settled thing as she had anticipated, and she began to hope the affection she felt sure Muriel felt was not unrequited.

Robert Gibson treated Miss Sinclair with the utmost deference; but there was nothing of familiar ease or assured affection in his manner.

"Perhaps it is his way!" reflected Jessie. "He looks like some *preux chevalier*, so perhaps, he can't conduct his wooing on modern lines. He seemed to treat Muriel as though she were a princess, and he a humble retainer; but I think she likes it!"

The conversation did not flow easily. Perhaps the presence of a stranger acted as a restraint on Jessie.

Robert Gibson, perceiving she was rather at a loss, excused himself on the plea of writing letters, and left the friends alone to enjoy a *little tête-à-tête*.

He did not close the door, and he left that of his own parlour, which stood opposite, ajar—not from the least idea of trying to overhear the girls' conversation, but from the simple fact that all the doors in the house urgently required the attentions of a locksmith.

Unless you banged them violently not one of them would shut at all, and it was even then nearly impossible to keep them closed unless a footstool, chair, or other article of furniture was placed against them inside.

Robert Gibson really had letters to write—letters entirely connected with his teaching engagements, and he took out his desk and set to work in the most businesslike fashion.

Left alone the two girls at first relapsed into



[ROBERT GIBSON LAY SENSELESS ON THE GROUND, THE SUN'S RAYS FALLING ON HIS WHITE FACE!]

allience, as two people often do when there is a subject each feels must be mentioned, and which neither likes to introduce. At last Jessie Campbell stooped down suddenly, and kissed Muriel's forehead, saying,—

"I like your Mr. Gibson very much!"

"He is not mine," said Muriel, trying to speak lightly. "He belongs to all of us. Indeed, the children claim him as their special property. He is very kind to them."

"He is much older than I expected."

"That is his beard," said Muriel, defending him as eagerly as though he had been blamed. "He is not thirty yet."

"He looks forty."

"But you like him, Jessie?" pleadingly.

"I like him very much, dear! Is he likely to stay here long?"

"I believe Dr. Netherton will keep him as long as he will stay. He is a very great favourite with the boys at Boxall's, and with the parents too."

"I did not mean that. I meant was he likely to stay with you long?"

Muriel looked up with a strange, cruel feeling, almost as though her friend had struck her.

Jessie Campbell knew the truth then—little Muriel had lost her heart to the classical master so completely, that it was pain to her even to think of his leaving her home.

"I do not suppose he will make any change," said Muriel, quietly. "He never complains of anything."

"And he is a pleasant companion for you?" Then, abruptly changing the subject in pity for her friend's blushes, she asked, "Do you remember the first time you came to see us, Muriel?"

"I shall never forget it!"

"Have you had any more of that trouble since?" asked Jessie, a little anxiously.

"None. I feel as safe as though he had left the neighbourhood."

"I saw him this afternoon; that is why I came here to-night, Muriel—to warn you."

No change came to Muriel's face. Perhaps

the three months of freedom from Mr. Baldwin had made her forget his persecution; perhaps she thought that as Robert Gibson loved her no other's wooing could trouble her.

"Tell me everything, please, Jessie. I think you are mistaken, for I am sure Mr. Baldwin has forgotten me."

"You shall judge for yourself," said Jessie Campbell, gravely. "I had taken the little Lesters (her pupils) to the athletic sports, and there were two men a little distance in front of us eagerly talking. I don't suppose I should have noticed them at all only the younger addressed the other as 'Herbert.' The familiar name roused my attention, and, looking round, I saw that the speaker was the man who troubled you so that night opposite our house. I could not help listening then. Mr. Herbert was begging the other to advance him some money, and he—Mr. Baldwin—refused."

"I can tell you his very words: 'No, my fine fellow; you've had a clear hundred out of me in the last month! Not another penny of my money do you see until you fulfil your part of the bargain. I think I've waited patiently long enough. You'd better go home and put the screw on; and I promise you, the day the wedding comes off, I'll give you back your bills, and two hundred pounds into the bargain. I shouldn't care for my wife's father to be imprisoned for debt.'"

"Jessie!"

"Don't look so terrified, dearest!" said Jessie Campbell, fondly. "In this nineteenth century, thank Heaven, a girl can't be married against her will. But, Muriel, I am afraid there is a terrible struggle before you, and I came to warn you. I thought you might be able to leave home."

"It would be best. But I ought to go at once, Jessie. Do you think your mother would take me in for a time, and then I could keep on my engagement at Mrs. Netherton's?"

"Mother would welcome you gladly. But, dear, think of the long walks to and fro at stated hours known to Mr. Herbert. Either he or that man may waylay your steps, and

make your life a terror to you. You would be happier by far, right away."

"But where? I have not a friend in the world away from Dornington!"

"But I have—at Warham, where the Melvilles live. I know, for my sake, you would be welcome. If my dear Paul had not been forced to leave me, by this time I should have been their daughter, and they are kindness itself to me still. Mr. Melville keeps a linen-draper's shop, but in thought and feeling he and his wife are the truest gentlefolks I have ever seen! Don't decide now, dear! Send me a line to-morrow, when you have thought it over. And if you feel it best for you to leave Dornington, I will promise you a welcome at the Melvilles."

The door closed on Jessie.

Half stunned by the news she had brought, Muriel put her hand to her head, and tried to think.

Only one thing was clear to her—as Betty was putting the children to bed, her best chance of consulting Robert was to go to him now, before her parents returned from their drive.

She had often entered his sitting-room before. Indeed, as their one servant was both young and incompetent, Muriel had to superintend most of the lodger's requirements.

She had taken her Latin lessons there; she had been in and out quite naturally until the time when he had told her the secret of his past and his own fruitless love for her—from that day she had never entered the room.

But it was no time for girlish reserve or scruples.

She had never been in such trouble as to-night. He was her friend, and never had she so sorely needed his help and advice.

Pushing the door wide open, she entered noiselessly, but the sight that met her eyes seemed to turn her into stone.

Robert Gibson lay senseless on the ground, the last rays of the setting sun falling full on his white, still face, which was as set and motionless as the features of the dead!

(To be continued.)



["YOU LOOK AS IF YOU WERE DISCUSSING SOME TERRIBLE PROBLEM, MR. NORL!" SAID MONA.]

NOVELETTE.]

MONA'S FAILURE.

—10—

CHAPTER I.

It was a tall, imposing-looking house in one of the broadest roads about Maida-vale—a house that under no circumstances could have been called homelike or cosy, but which, under the auspices of its present mistress, had contrived to attain for itself such an amount of stiffness and dignity as quite to distinguish it from all its neighbours; and though there was no plate on the door, and the name St. Ronan's on the gateposts had no particular educational flavour about it, yet one glance convinced the most casual passer-by that the large unhomelike building was a school.

And the assumption was perfectly right. St. Ronan's was a school of the most select and exclusive type. Miss Morris had long ago saved sufficient to retire upon; but the lady had grown used to the routine of her life as Principal of such an establishment. She loved managing, had a veritable talent for piling up extras, and, in fact, felt that she should be quite thrown away if she drifted into private life.

A tall and elegant-looking woman of over fifty, who dressed invariably in the softest and richest of black silk, she looked what she was—a gentlewoman by birth, and one who in her youth had moved in the best society.

Miss Morris had faults, but she was not a sham. Everything about her establishment was genuine—the best of professors, ample and dainty food, every comfort needful for health; and, besides these, a really conscientious superintendence she gave her pupils, and if she charged a far higher price than she need have done for these things, the fault probably rested with the public, who never remonstrated with her on that subject.

Miss Morris sat in a low easy chair, in her

own special sanctum, one July evening, about four weeks before the end of the summer term. All things were going well with St. Ronan's. The last batch of pupils sent up for the public examinations had passed, and passed high. A most gratifying call had been made on the Principal that very afternoon by the wife of a peer to make arrangements for her daughter joining the ranks of St. Ronan's after the vacation. This completed the full twenty, a number of pupils Miss Morris never exceeded.

Prosperity, popularity, good health, and the satisfaction of feeling herself a power in her little world, all these were Miss Morris's, and yet she looked troubled and ill-pleased.

She rose presently and rang the bell. She was not the woman to postpone a duty because it was disagreeable. She was prompt in all actions, when once she had decided on them. She did not like the step she was about to take, and yet, having resolved on it, she would not shrink it for a day.

"Ask Miss Carstairs to come to me here," she said to the page who answered the bell.

A minute's delay and a girl of eighteen or nineteen appeared—a slight, delicate looking creature, who was evidently in no small awe of the Principal. She was dressed in black, and, without being actually shabby, her attire told of poverty.

The dress was of plain merino, rather coarse. It was made without the smallest attempt at taste or fashion; there was no trimming on the badly-hung scanty skirt, and the sleeves were a good two inches too short—a strange contrast to the elegant costumes affected by the young ladies of St. Ronan's, and to the soft rich silk which fitted Miss Morris so admirably.

"Sit down," said the Principal, not unkindly. "I want to talk to you a little, Miss Carstairs. Do you know I have had a letter from your aunt about you this morning?"

The pink spots burned in the girl's cheek, making her for the moment almost beautiful.

They faded all too quickly, leaving her even paler than before.

"Mrs. Carstairs wrote to me," she said, timidly. "She seemed vexed I could not tell her whether I satisfied you, Miss Morris."

"My dear, if you remember, I told your aunt I did not believe you had enough age or dignity for even a junior teacher here. I promised to try the experiment for a term, letting you help with the children, and receiving lessons from the professors in return. I thought that would give her time to make some other arrangements for you. I never thought of your staying here permanently."

There were tears in Mona's eyes as she answered,—

"I have done my best, Miss Morris. I have indeed," said the poor girl, earnestly.

"I am sure you have," said Miss Morris, kindly; "but you are too young and too yielding to get on here. The fact is, my dear, you have not the spirits or energy to cope with strong, healthy girls. You always look ready to cry if things go wrong, and that is not the way to get through life. I think you have made a mistake in choosing teaching for a profession. Unless your character changes very much you will never have any authority over your pupils."

"But what am I to do?" asked Mona, half deprecatingly. "I have been brought up to teach, and I don't know how to do anything else."

"Pardon me, Miss Carstairs. I am not complaining of your acquirements, but of your management. You are so disheartened and low-spirited, the youngest child could see and take advantage of it. I have watched you carefully, and I have never yet seen you look happy. To succeed with young people you ought to be cheerful."

Mona sighed.

"Then you will not take me back after the holidays, Miss Morris?"

"I cannot. My school would become undis-

ciplined if I kept a teacher who could not make herself obeyed. I will write to Mrs. Carstairs and assure her it is not your fault."

"She will never believe you," said Mona, with a sob. "She says I am born to be a failure, and a trouble to her."

"Is she your only relation?" asked Miss Morris, kindly. "Tell me all about your family, and I will try to think of something to help you. I do not care for Mrs. Carstairs, and I can quite understand she makes things hard for you."

It was a very simple story, but Caroline Morris thought, as she listened to it, she had rarely heard one sadder.

The only child of a retired officer and his wife, Mona's early days had been full of happiness. Her mother died when she was twelve years old; her father one year later. He had invested the price of his commission in an annuity on the joint lives of himself and his wife, and so was unable to make any provision for his child. All he could do was to send for his only surviving brother, and beg him to take care of Mona.

Hugh Carstairs had offended all his family by his marriage. His father had cut him off without even the proverbial shilling. His eldest brother had died young, leaving one son, who was brought up by his grandfather; and who now, when Hugh Carstairs was a lad of seventeen, the head of the family, and Sir Roland Carstairs of Carstairs.

To appeal to him would have been useless. He had not even the disposal of his own property. Charles Carstairs, his younger uncle and guardian, seemed the only suitable protector for Mona, and so to him the dying father wrote in his anguish; and he, a jovial good-tempered man of forty, had come down to the little village, soothed his brother's last moments, and taken Mona home with him.

"If only Uncle Charles had lived things would have been different," Mona assured Miss Morris; "but he died only three months after papa, and I think his wife always hated me. She managed to get me into a kind of charity school, and I stayed there, holidays and all, until I was seventeen. Then I had a very bad illness, and they said I was not strong enough to be trained for a teacher. Aunt Mary sent me down to Carstairs, Sir Roland was abroad, and she had the use of his house; and a kind old housekeeper, who had known papa, nursed me till I was quite well, and then Mrs. Carstairs brought me here."

"But surely they would help you at the school where you stayed so long?"

Mona shook her head.

"They said I should never be strong enough for anything but private teaching, and that I looked too young to enter a family."

Miss Morris frowned inwardly, for it was her own opinion clothed in different words.

"You might be a companion," she said, hopefully. "Has your aunt thought of that?"

"She tried to find me a companionship before I came here, but she could hear of nothing."

"Has she any children of her own?"

"Three girls. They are all older than I am—at least, they used to be."

"What do you mean, child?" exclaimed the principal. "If they were older than you once they always would be."

"No," said Mona, simply. "May come out when she was eighteen, just four years ago (she is the second), but she told me at Christmas she was nineteen."

"Hem!" Miss Morris looked scornful. "I should not think it a very desirable home for you."

"I would rather sweep a crossing than go there!" cried Mona, impulsively. "Miss Morris, couldn't you keep me here?"

"No, my dear, I couldn't. I must not risk the children's growing disobedient, and I am sure your nerves would get utterly unstrung if you went on putting such a strain on them; but there are four clear weeks before the holidays, and I will try and think of some plan for you before then."

The plan was very simple. She drove over to Peper-ton Place, and interviewed Mrs. Carstairs. She found the widow in a small house in a very aristocratic neighbourhood, and being a shrewd woman took her measure in five minutes.

"Poor and unscrupulous. Lives beyond her means in the hope of marrying her daughter well. The worst possible home for that poor child."

Mrs. Carstairs was all civility to her visitor until Mona's name was mentioned, then she spoke bitterly of the burden and expense the girl was to her (Miss Morris remembered the pupil-teacher's poor little wardrobe, and doubted the last item), and how foolishly generous it had been of her late husband to impose such a charge upon her.

"You should ask your nephew to assist you," suggested the schoolmistress, mildly. "To a man of Sir Roland's wealth a small provision for his cousin would be a trifle."

"Roland is like a son of my own, but I would not tax his kindness. Some day, perhaps, when he is really my son, I might—"

"Do you mean he is engaged to your daughter?" asked Miss Morris, bluntly.

"There is no formal engagement. Dear Molly was too young when Roland went abroad for such a thing. But we have always seen how his wishes tended, and when he comes home from his foreign tour I dare say I shall be persuaded to give my consent. A mother is always weak where her children's happiness is concerned."

"And what about poor Mona?" demanded Miss Morris, coming back to the charge. "If you persist in making her a governess you will have her back on your hands every three months, I warn you."

"But she must earn her own living."

"Undoubtedly, but at present she is not strong enough to manage herself, much less others. Give her a year's holiday, and let her have a taste of happiness and cheerful society. After that she will be another creature."

Mrs. Carstairs shook her head.

"I cannot possibly have her here. She does not get on with my own girls; besides, think of the expense of dressing her and taking her about! But I have the greatest respect for your opinion, Miss Morris, and if you really think she needs rest I will pay for her board at some home or institution. I believe there is a place in the country where they take in governesses for ten shillings a week."

Miss Morris only kept her temper by an effort as she listened to this liberal offer.

"I am afraid such a place would not improve either your niece's health or spirits. Is it possible that her mother left any relations who would be willing to receive Mona on a good long visit? Blood is thicker than water, and perhaps they might not have the excessive sensitiveness of your daughters, and so not object to the society of a poor relation."

The sarcasm was quite lost upon Mrs. Carstairs, who answered, affably,—

"My unfortunate brother-in-law married beneath him, and his wife's family were in very humble life."

"Just so. Could you give me any clue to finding them out? It would be good for Mona to have their acquaintance, and might relieve you of her support."

"I tried to trace them when my husband died. I went down to the village where Mrs. Hugh Carstairs had lived before her marriage, but I could discover nothing of her relations. Her father and mother were both dead, and her only sister had gone to join a brother in the Colonies."

"I suppose you do not happen to remember which colony?" said Miss Morris, quietly.

"Oh, yes. The Cape—a place called Spring Vale. Mr. West has been there for thirty years, so no doubt he has become quite a savage, and he was in a very low way of life before he went. In fact, he worked his passage out."

"All the more credit to him," said the

schoolmistress. "Well, Mrs. Carstairs, I shall write to Mr. West, and ask if he would be willing to do anything for his sister's child. I intend spending the vacation in Devonshire, and if Mona has not found anything suitable perhaps you will let her be my guest until we hear from her uncle."

"I shall be delighted. It is so good of you." But evidently the lady would have been more grateful if Miss Morris had proposed to retain Mona as an unpaid teacher.

"I have seen your aunt," said the Principal to Mona that same evening. "and I quite understand your not wishing to go back to her. She tells me you have an uncle—your mother's brother—in South Africa, and I mean to write to him."

Mona shivered.

"It sounds like begging."

"No, it doesn't. Mr. West may have children he wants a governess for, or he may know of some family seeking a teacher. Anyway, the voyage out and the new life might make a different creature of you."

But Mona was still sad.

"It only wants four weeks to the holidays," she said, gravely, "and it would take seven to get an answer from Africa, even if it came by return of post."

"Well, I have told Mrs. Carstairs I hope you will be my guest in Devonshire for the vacation. We will leave the school and its regulations behind us, Mona, and try if the sea-air will not make you brighter."

"It is good of you!" said the girl, gratefully; "but, Miss Morris, I can't go to the seaside with you. You know heaps of people, and—"

"And I am not fond of black dresses in the dog-days," said Miss Morris, cheerfully guessing what was in the girl's mind. "Never mind, Mona, if you are to be my companion you ought to have a salary of some kind, and I think it had better take the form of a summer outfit for the seaside!"

Caroline Morris had not kept a school more than half her life without finding out that letter-writing was an art which required both tact and skill.

She gave a whole hour to her epistle to Reuben West, and the result was happy, for the note could in no way have offended the most irritable of men; and since it asked for nothing but his advice, did not come at all under the category of begging letters.

She said very simply that his niece, Mona Carstairs, was in delicate health, and required change of scene. She had been educated for a governess, and was an accomplished, sweet-tempered girl. Did Mr. West think there was any opening for her in Spring Vale, and, if so, would he give her the benefit of his recommendation.

Miss Morris concluded by expressing her warm interest in Mona, and regret the girl was not old enough to fill a recognised position in her school. She was sure her young friend was unhappy among her father's relations, and she thought the sea voyage would greatly benefit her health!

CHAPTER II.

ONLY two months from the evening on which poor Mona Carstairs had received her dismissal from St. Roman's, and two ladies were seated in a pretty private sitting room at their hotel at Daymouth, the new watering-place only a few miles from Plymouth.

Miss Morris did not do things by halves. In taking Mona to Devonshire with her she had meant to give the girl a real taste of pleasure, and she had succeeded thoroughly. From the pretty outfit and new leather trunks to the little purse slipped into her hand, with a whisper about bathing and other little expenses, the schoolmistress had forgotten nothing that could add to the girl's pleasure, with the result that only three weeks after their arrival at Daymouth Mona looked another creature, and Miss Morris fancied she

had discovered the true reason for Mrs. Carstairs keeping her niece in such a subdued, despondent state, since this bright-eyed, smiling Mona might have proved quite a formidable rival to her three more fortunate cousins.

Miss Carstairs was sitting on the balcony, her long waving hair flowing over her shoulders that it might dry in the sunshine, for she had only just come in from bathing.

The sun had kissed her face, and robbed it of the pallid sickly hue which had been its accustomed tint, besides giving her cheeks some roses. Then, instead of the miserable coarse merino, she wore a boating costume of thin blue serge, trimmed with white braid, and a white silk handkerchief knotted at her throat.

Her pretty feet were encased in dainty, well-made shoes—in fact, she looked more like a rich man's petted child than the little neglected half-pupil of St. Ronan's.

Miss Morris looked on well pleased at the change her liberality had worked. A martinet in business matters, she had decided not to keep Mona the moment she made up her mind it would be against the interests of her school; but in private life the successful Principal could afford to indulge her fancies, and having conceived the wish to see Mona's face when she was happy, she had set to work to gratify the whim with admirable results. In fact, she petted her young friend to such an extent that Mona wondered how she could ever have been afraid of her.

"Come indoors now," said Miss Morris, kindly. "I can't talk seriously while you stay on the balcony, and I have just had a letter from your uncle."

"From Africa?" asked Mona, as she obeyed, and placed her chair near her friend's.

"Yes. I am glad it did not come until we had had this pleasant time together. You will believe now, Mona, that I don't want to advise you against your own wishes!"

"I am sure you do not."

"Then read this letter."

"Spring Vale, Cape Colony,
1st August, 1885.

"DEAR MADAM,—

"I beg to acknowledge, with thanks, your letter of the 4th ult. Until it reached me I was in ignorance not only of my sister's death, but even that she had left a child. You may have heard Captain Carstairs regarded his wife's family as much beneath him, and he insisted that she should break off all intercourse with us on her marriage. I had been abroad then ten years, and my opinion was neither asked nor offered, or I should certainly have told Naomi no good could come of an unequal match.

"The past is past, and I am getting an elderly man. I have no daughter of my own, and if Naomi's child is really obliged to work for her living, I think it is better that she should cast in her lot with me, rather than seek a home among strangers. From your letter you show so warm an interest in my niece that I am sure you will give her your advice and counsel. If she is a plain-spoken, sensible girl, who can be content without fashionable folk, and does not look down on a man because he has earned his own living, send her out to me, and I will see to her future; but if she has been brought up to be a fine lady we should never get on, and she had better remain in England. I enclose a draft for a hundred pounds, for her passage and outfit, if she should decide to come to me. If she thinks she shall be happier in her native land, let her keep the money as a present from her mother's brother.

"Yours faithfully,

"REUBEN WEST."

"P.S.—I should like to have your decision by return mail. If Mona comes here she ought to sail not later than the end of September, so as to arrive before the heat of summer begins to be oppressive."

Mona Carstairs read this letter carefully through, and then she said gravely,—

"I should like to go."

"Why?" asked Miss Morris, laconically. She had quite decided that Mona must go, but she wanted to know the reasons that had brought about the girl's choice.

"I think he would be kind, and, Miss Morris, I would rather starve than go back to my aunt Carstairs. After all your kindness, I think her cruelty would be worse to bear than ever."

"You must not expect an English gentleman," said Miss Morris, thoughtfully. "Remember, if you go to Mr. West, you must not let him feel you are ashamed of his homely ways!"

"Mother was a lady," said Mona, thoughtfully. "She died when I was only twelve, but I am sure of that, her brother couldn't be very dreadful."

"He worked his passage out to Africa thirty years ago," said Miss Morris, thoughtfully, "and he has probably associated with very common people since. Then he may be married, and his wife be a very inferior person!"

Mona shook her head.

"I think I will risk it. I am so tired of being told I am a failure. Uncle Reuben will be kind to me for my mother's sake, and his wife can't be worse to me than Mrs. Carstairs."

"The mail goes out to-morrow. If you are quite decided, Mona, I will write, then we can drive into Plymouth to-day, and make inquiries about the ships."

The next term of St. Ronan's commenced on the twenty second of September, and Miss Morris decided that as it was not worth while for Mona to return to London, she herself could manage to stay in Devonshire until the middle of September, which would give her time to see her charge safely on board the *Grecian*, which left Plymouth on the twelfth. It was a little sooner than the time named by Mr. West, but no doubt he would be agreeably surprised at their promptitude.

The passage was taken that very afternoon, and the next fortnight Miss Mona spent a great part of each day in shopping, so that Mona's wardrobe increased rapidly.

"I shall not write to Mrs. Carstairs until you are fairly gone," said the schoolmistress, kindly, "unless you wish to say good-bye to her."

Mona shook her head.

"I never want to see her again. You are the only creature in England I shall miss. You have been so good to me!"

"You will be coming back some of these days," said Miss Morris, cheerfully, "and then you must pay me a visit at St. Ronan's. I have saved ten pounds from Mr. West's draft to put in your purse; and now, Mona, let me give you three little hints. Don't let your uncle know you expected him to be common. If he has a wife don't betray surprise, if you find her ways different from those you have been used to; and, above all, my dear, never ask them for money. I believe people who have got rich suddenly particularly dislike parting with it. Your outfit will last some time, and I daresay your uncle will give you something of his own accord if you wait, but don't ask for it!"

"I couldn't!" said Mona, gravely. "I think it would choke me to ask for money; but, Miss Morris, do you think he is rich?"

"I fancy he must have plenty of money, or he could not have sent that cheque. Perhaps," added the spinster, whose ideas were slightly hazy as to social life in the colonies, "there is nothing to spend money on out there, and so people are rich on a little."

The day came at last. Miss Morris took her charge on board the *Grecian*, and requesting an interview with the captain, commended Miss Carstairs to his special charge.

"She is going to Spring Vale," commenced the lady, speaking much as though Mona had been a hamper, "and I expect she will be sent for as soon as the ship gets to the Cape; but,

perhaps, if not you could kindly see to her getting there!"

The Captain smiled and promised. Probably it was not the first time by a good many he had been intrusted with similar charges.

Miss Morris embraced Mona with something like a tear in her eyes, and then stepped in to the boat waiting to take her on shore. Ten minutes later the *Grecian* was sailing away from the English coast.

A kind-hearted old lady, who had watched the leave-taking, turned to Mona with a cheerful inquiry, "was she going the Cape, and was she all alone?"

"Yes; I am going out to my uncle!" said Miss Carstairs, who had received a hint not to allude to Mr. West by name.

"Ah! I've crossed nine times in all, and now I'm going home again. I've been in the colony hard on forty years."

"And is it nice?"

The old lady laughed.

"It's not a bad place. My girls say it's better than England; but then you see they were born out there!"

By the time they reached Madeira Mona had decided there was nothing so delightful as a sea voyage.

The pretty, bright-eyed English girl was a general favourite with all the passengers, and no one who had seen her cheerful smile would have believed she was the depressed, mournful-looking pupil-teacher of St. Ronan's.

Mona found Miss Morris's directions very difficult to obey. She had been strictly admonished not to speak of her uncle, and when her new friends showed a great interest in her future she was obliged to parry their questions as best she could.

Oddly enough, the general impression received was that she was going to her father's brother; and as no one on board the *Grecian* had actually been to Spring Vale they concluded "Mr. Carstairs" must be a very old man, who never stirred beyond his own town, and therefore was little known in the colony at large.

"He won't keep her long!" said Mrs. Ingleton (the lady who had "crossed nine times") to the Captain one afternoon when they were within a day or two of the Cape. "Depend upon it that child will marry before she's been out a year!"

Captain Peters smiled. He was not blind to the fact that Miss Carstairs was extremely pretty, and that one or two gentlemen on board thought so. He followed Mrs. Ingleton's glance, and saw Mona finishing a little sketch she had made of St. Helena when they stopped at that island. A tall young man was standing close to her, apparently directing her efforts.

"Yes," said the Captain, drily. "I know Noel is fond of art; but I don't think in this case his interest in the sketching is purely professional. What do you say?"

"They would make a handsome couple!" said Mrs. Ingleton, approvingly. "Who is he?"

"I've no idea. He has crossed with us two or three times, but I don't think he has any relations at the Cape. He's unusually silent about himself; and, though all the ladies like him, this is the first time I ever saw him really taken with one of them."

Meanwhile Mona had dropped her pencil, and leaned back in her deck-chair, as though inclined for a nap.

Mr. Noel watched her thoughtfully. He seemed only a few years her senior—a handsome, earnest-looking man, with dark brown hair, blue eyes, and a strangely sad expression of face.

"I cannot make it out," he said at last.

"Cannot make what out?" demanded Mona. "You look as though you were discussing some terrible problem, Mr. Noel!"

"I cannot understand your starting on a voyage like this by yourself. What on earth were your relations thinking about to let you?"

"I haven't many, and they were decidedly glad to be relieved of me."

"I can't believe that! And you really have an uncle in Africa? Do you know I never heard of a Mr. Carstairs out there?"

Mona blushed crimson.

"I know something of the family," went on Mr. Noel. "I have met Mrs. Charles Carstairs and her daughters. I may say they have discussed their relations before me pretty freely, but they never mentioned any in Africa."

Mona looked at the young man wistfully.

"I would rather tell you the truth," she said, simply, "but Miss Morris advised me not to speak of my uncle if I could help it. I am going to my mother's brother, and so his name is not Carstairs at all."

"And why were you not to speak of him?"

"Because Miss Morris thought people might tell me things about him, and she said it would be fairer to judge for myself."

Noel smiled.

"Your secret is safe with me," he said, kindly. "And I daresay she is right, for I know people do gossip on board ship. Is your uncle married? Does he live at Cape Town?"

"He lives at Spring Vale. He has no children, but I don't know if he is married. He went abroad more than thirty years ago."

"I hope he will be good to you," returned the young man, half dreamily. "I have heard Mrs. Carstairs speak of you, but I always fancied you were a child."

"I am nineteen."

"And Alice is twenty-one. She is the youngest of the three girls. Are any of your cousins engaged?"

"Not formally; but Mary, the second, is to marry Sir Roland Carstairs when he comes from his foreign tour."

"Who told you so?"

"Aunt Mary. I heard it more than a year ago. It is quite settled."

"I don't think it is," retorted Mr. Noel.

"I know Roland Carstairs intimately, and I don't believe he is a marrying man."

"Is he nice?"

"I really don't know what a lady means by that word. He is not a bad-meaning fellow."

"I used to wish I knew him," said Mona, absently. "You see, he is my cousin just as much as Alice's, and I used to pity him because he had no parents. He was quite as much alone in the world as me."

"And is likely to remain so," answered Mr. Noel. "He is not the sort of fellow to make many friends."

"Why not?"

"Oh, I don't know. To begin with, he's awfully rich, and he has a dread of being made much of on that account; and then he isn't strong."

"His mother died of consumption," said Mona, gravely. "I remember hearing of it. She was an earl's daughter. I believe that was why all the family were so angry at my father's marriage. They thought he might have found a high-born wife like his brother."

"Heaven forbid!" muttered Mr. Noel from behind his moustache; and then he walked off abruptly, leaving Mona to herself.

But ship-board gossip was not wrong in saying that he paid her a great deal of attention.

He never said a word that could embarrass her; he showered no idle compliments upon her; but from the moment he heard her name he seemed to make her comfort his first care, and to regard her as his own peculiar charge.

Mrs. Ingleton believed it was a genuine love affair, but that Mr. Noel had old-fashioned notions, and would not speak the decisive words without the sanction of Mona's uncle.

Captain Peters was not so sure. He had seen a great deal of the young Englishman, and had never thought him likely to marry.

The anxiously-expected moment came at last. In the small hours of the morning the ship dropped anchor in Table Bay, and Mona's first waking thought was to wonder whether her uncle had sent anyone to meet her, or if she should receive a letter instructing her how to reach Spring Vale.

Somehow there had been so much to amuse

and divert her on the voyage. Everyone had been so unfailingly kind to her. She had enjoyed everything so much that she had found but little time to trouble about her future, and had well-nigh forgotten the dreary truth that she had come to Africa as the "poor relation" of a man who had worked his way out from England thirty years before.

Mona awoke early—hours before it was of any use to rise. And as she lay in her berth thinking over her future she grew very anxious.

Supposing her uncle was married to a wife after the pattern of Mrs. Carstairs, and that the lady objected to his charitable invitation?

There was nothing in Mr. West's letter about his own circumstances, except that he had no daughter. He might have married late in life; and, if so, the very fact of there being no message from his wife seemed to prove she objected to Mona's coming.

Then, supposing they kept no servant, and Mrs. West did her own housework, in what would she expect her niece to assist her?

Mona decided she must refuse no work, however humble. But she hoped her ignorance would be forgiven for having spent her life from thirteen to the present time in schools, except a brief spell of illness, and a briefer visit to the Carstairs', she knew about as little of domestic duties as it was possible for a girl to know. Certainly she could undertake needlework, both plain and fancy, was fair at accounts, and wrote a clear, plain hand. Perhaps her uncle would let her assist in his business. It would be pleasanter than pottering about the kitchen.

Enter the stewardess, with early coffee and biscuit.

"It's not far off seven, Miss Carstairs, and I thought you'd like to be getting up. And I've brought you this letter."

Left alone, Mona took up the missive with its unfamiliar brown stamp and large post-mark. She knew at once it came from her uncle, for she recognised the writing as the same as that the letter Miss Morris had received from him. Evidently he was not coming to meet her, and had sent all instructions for her journey. On the whole, Mona felt relieved.

If Mr. West were a very uncount member of society it would be pleasanter not to meet him under the eye of the critical passengers of the *Grecian*.

She did not hurry over her toilet, and she waited to read her uncle's letter till she was dressed. She felt no curiosity as to its contents. The mere fact of receiving it proved she was to continue her journey in solitude.

Her attire had somewhat troubled Mona, for though Mr. West had sent money for her outfit she had an idea (the result of her Aunt Carstairs's training) that as a "poor relation" she ought not to look too well-dressed, and as Miss Morris had bestowed both time and taste in the selection of her clothes she hardly possessed anything that would come under the head of "dowdy." As Mr. West had specially mentioned his objection to finery and fashion he might take umbrage at some of her costumes.

But this fear faded away now the great man was not coming, and Miss Carstairs put on a fascinating blue serge dress, braided in the same colour, which fitted her like a glove, quite vain enough to be glad to look her best on her farewell with her new friends, a sailor-hat sat gracefully on her fair hair. She looked just the picture of happy girlhood as she tripped lightly up the steps of the companion-ladder on to the deck.

Mr. Noel was waiting for her.

"I want to hear your first impressions of Africa," he said, kindly. "What do you think of it?"

"It looks very red—and who in the world are all these people?"

He laughed.

"Most of the passengers have friends to welcome them. Then a few of the strangers are here to see the captain on business. It is

quite a usual thing to see a crowd of fresh faces at breakfast on these occasions. You will miss a few familiar ones, too, for some of the passengers have gone on shore."

"Already!"

"Well, its past eight, and they thought they might as well breakfast at home."

One of the strangers passed close to Mona and her companion—a tall, bearded man, who might have been a little over thirty. He was dressed in a rough tweed suit, which fitted him well. His bearing was erect and soldier-like, his face grave and thoughtful. It seemed to Mona he looked at her searchingly.

"Who is that?" she asked Noel, when he was out of ear shot.

"I have no idea. I can tell you one thing about him, he has an English tailor. He is probably husband, son, or brother of one of our passengers, and is getting a little annoyed at the lady's not making more haste to greet him."

"Are you going to stay in Cape Town, Mr. Noel?" asked Mona, suddenly.

"I have no idea—and you? Is your uncle coming to take you to Spring Vale?"

"Oh, no. He has written instructions for my journey."

"And what are they?"

"I don't know. I haven't opened his letter."

Noel smiled.

"I should advise you to do so at once. He has probably deputed some friend living here to receive you, and see you into the train. That is quite the custom out here. Your temporary host or hostess may be on board and watching for you all this time."

"You really think so?"

"Certainty is better than thought," replied Noel, cheerfully. "You had better open your letter at once. I will see that you are undisturbed," and he retreated to a little distance as Mona took out the letter and tore it open anxiously, for his words had alarmed her not a little.

"Spring Vale, October 1st.

"MY DEAR NIECE,—

"I am very glad to hear you have decided to cast in your lot with us, and hope you may be very happy in South Africa. I cannot well leave home just at present, but your cousin Norman is in Cape Town, and I have asked him to meet you, and bring you to Spring Vale, where you will receive a warm welcome from your affectionate uncle,

"REUBEN WEST."

Mona's cheeks grew crimson with dismay. This was worse than anything she had expected. Her uncle himself might have been an awkward person to present to her friends on board; but, at least, he was her mother's own brother.

She already owed him gratitude, and these thoughts would have helped her to bear with his shortcomings, but his son—?

Mona pictured to herself a red-faced, freckled youth of the ploughboy type, who would probably call her "Miss," and certainly have no conversation beyond "Yes" and "No."

How devoutly she wished she had opened the letter in her cabin, and not have come on deck until the last moment. Now she would probably have to breakfast with her cousin, and do the honours of the ship to him. She had not the slightest experience of boys, and she imagined Norman to be more of a boy than a man.

Her uncle had been thirty years in the Colony. Probably it took him twelve to grow rich enough to think of matrimony, which would bring his son to the age of sixteen or seventeen.

"What is the matter?" asked Mr. Noel, as he came back to her side. "Do you know you are looking as though an avalanche of trouble had fallen on your head?"

"I think it has."

"But what is wrong? Is your uncle ill? Did he not expect you by this steamer?"

"He is quite well, and he has sent my cousin to meet me. O! Mr. Noel, what shall I do? How can I travel hundreds of miles with a great awkward boy I have never seen?"

Noel laughed, though his voice was kind. "Cheer up, if that is all. Depend upon it the 'boy' will be more afraid of you than you can possibly be of him. When is he coming?"

"I don't know."

"Well, I should say you need not try and find him. As soon as he comes on board he will ask one of the officials for 'Miss Carstairs.' The burden of the search rests with him."

Again the dark-haired man, whom Noel had declared must have an English tailor, passed close to them, and this time there was no mistaking the fact that he looked steadily at them, his grave eyes expressing marked disapproval.

"I don't like that man!" said Mona, with a little shiver. "He looks as though he hated me."

"Nonsense!" returned Mr. Noel. "I grant you he looks terribly in earnest; but it is a head and face anyone might be proud of."

The bells sounded for breakfast.

Mona had risen to go below when Captain Peters came up to her.

"I am to resign the charge Miss Morris entrusted to me," he said, pleasantly, "for your cousin has arrived. He has asked me to present him to you!"

Mona was trembling in every limb.

Noel had retreated at once.

"This is your cousin, Doctor," said the Captain, cordially. "I'm sure if I had known she was your father's niece it would have been an extra inducement to me to take care of her, though, as it was, I think we all did our best to make things pleasant for her. Eh! Miss Carstairs!"

"They have been delightful!" said Mona, timidly, and then venturing to look up she saw that the man presented to her was the stranger who had been watching her so intently. Involuntarily she drew a step back, and said, naively, "you can't be my cousin!"

He bowed stiffly.

"I have a letter from my father in my pocket if you require proofs of my identity, or I fancy Captain Peters would assure you I am Norman West."

"Of course, I will," said the Captain, heartily. "Norman West, M.D., who has crossed the ocean twice with me already, and whom I hope to take over again before long."

"I know it sounds ridiculous," said Mona, trying to speak naturally, "and you will laugh at me, but I expected a boy!"

They did laugh, both of them; but as the Captain went off Dr. Norman's face softened, and he spoke to Mona in a much kinder tone.

"I think I understand. My father wrote that his 'boy' would meet you. It's a way he has, and I can't get him to leave it off. I am over thirty, but I believe he will always think of me as a lad!"

They went down to breakfast, and Dr. West attended to his cousin's wants with scrupulous courtesy; but Mona was disappointed to see how formal his manner was.

Had they been utter strangers instead of first cousins he could not have seemed more coldly distant. She had been prepared for want of polish and courtly ways. It came on her suddenly that she would have preferred them to this perfect politeness, which yet had no warmth in it.

"I suppose he is married, and has half-a-dozen children, so that he grudges my having a home at his father's," thought the girl, bitterly. "Well, he need not make it quite so plain how unwelcome I am!"

Dr. West broke the silence suddenly.

"There is a train for Spring Vale at twelve. Do you think you will be ready to travel by it? We ought to see the sights of Cape Town; but I think my father would prefer to show

you those himself. I am a wretched hand at that sort of thing!"

"I had much rather go by the twelve o'clock train!"

"That's right. How much luggage have you? I must go and see about getting it through the Customs. I suppose you won't mind trusting me with your keys?"

She gave them up at once, and Dr. West jotted down the list of her boxes on a piece of paper. Then he said, carelessly,—

"I suppose you will have plenty to do in saying good-bye to your friends. I will come back for you at half-past eleven."

Mrs. Ingleton seized Mona's hands when the girl came to take leave of her, and cried reproachfully,—

"My dear, why didn't you tell me you were Mr. West's niece?"

"Do you know him?"

"I have met him once or twice; but every one knows him by name. He is the chief man in Spring Vale, and his son is the cleverest doctor for miles!"

"I don't like him!" said Mona, rashly.

"He is not a lady's man!" admitted Mrs. Ingleton; "but under the circumstances what can you expect, and he has a heart of gold. He was at the Cape University with my two boys, and they both swear by him!"

Of course the "circumstances" meant his humble birth, Mona hastily decided. Aloud she asked anxiously,—

"Will you do me a favour, Mrs. Ingleton?"

"Of course I will!"

"I know very little—of my uncle or his family." Here she hesitated, "I don't like to ask my cousin, and it would be so much more comfortable to know a little before I get to Spring Vale. For instance, is there a Mrs. West, and—?" here she blushed palpably, "does my uncle keep a shop?"

Mrs. Ingleton laughed till the tears ran down her cheeks.

"I'm glad you came to me, Mona," she said, kindly, "for it would have been awkward for you not to know; and though I've never been to Spring Vale myself, I've heard enough from my boys to tell you all you want to hear. Mr. West had an ostrich farm when he first came out, and later on he took to shares, like most people in Africa did about that time. He does not do anything now except attend to the affairs of the company which purchased his claims. I don't know how much money he has, but he is very rich."

"His wife died years and years ago. He has only this one son, who received the best education to be had in the colony, and then went home to walk the London hospitals. Mr. West has been a member of the Cape Parliament twice, and everyone in the colony knows him—at least by name. I think you are the luckiest girl I know to be going to live with him!"

"And you won't tell anyone?" pleaded Mona.

"Tell anyone you came out knowing nothing about him?" answered Mrs. Ingleton.

"No! I'll keep that between ourselves, dear; and whenever your uncle brings you to Cape Town, remember you must come and see my girls. There'll always be a welcome for you in Grave-street."

Noel's farewell to Mona was almost solemn in its earnestness. If those who believed the two almost plighted lovers could have overheard his words they would have been surprised.

"I want you to promise me one thing," said the young man, as he held the girl's hand in a close embrace. "If ever you are in any trouble or difficulty, will you write to me? If I can ever help you will you trust me to do so as gladly as though I were your brother?"

"I shall never forget your kindness," said Mona, gratefully. "Mr. Noel, if you stay long in Africa, won't you come to Spring Vale?"

He shook his head.

"I think not. Now, will you promise me if you are unhappy, if you find things less

pleasant than you expect in your uncle's house, will you let me know? I—I have friends in England, and I know I could arrange a home for you there if you do not like Spring Vale!"

"It is very good of you, but—"

"I knew your father," he said, earnestly. "I may say I have been intimate with many of the Carstairs family. Will you not look on me as a friend, and give me this promise?"

And so Mona gave it. Impressed by his earnestness she pledged herself to write to Mr. Noel if ever she needed a friend's help, and accepted his banker's address in Cape Town, where he said letters could always be forwarded to him while he remained in Africa.

"And I shall send you word myself if I return to England. There is just one thing more," he added. "Are you likely to write to Mrs. Carstairs or her daughter?"

"I do not think so."

"If you should have occasion to write do not mention my name to them. I have no unworthy motive for asking this, but I am connected in their minds with your cousin, Roland, and I know they are most anxious he should return to England. If Mrs. Carstairs heard where I was, she might write and ask me to try and influence him—and that I could not do."

"I will be sure never to mention your name; but, Mr. Noel, why does not Roland return to England? I went to Carstairs once, and it is such a beautiful place, I can't understand how anyone can stay away from such a home. The old servants are so devoted to my cousin they quite long for his return!"

"Do they know why he left?"

"I think not. It was his old nurse told me the story. By my grandfather's will he was not to marry until he came of age, and on his twenty-first birthday he was advised to go abroad. There was a letter telling him what places he had better visit, and he was not to open it until he had left England. Roland started on his birthday, and went first to Germany, but he has never come home to Carstairs since, and he has been gone over two years now."

"I do not think he ever will return," said Noel, gravely, "but depend upon it, Miss Carstairs, he knows his own business best."

CHAPTER III.

In a low Maderia chair placed in a shady corner of the wide verandah which ran round her uncle's house sat, or rather reclined, Mona Carstairs one November afternoon.

It was the beginning of the African summer; the sky was a perfect cloudless azure, the heat so great that Mona felt it even in her cool dress of white cambric.

All around her spoke of prosperity. The house was built on the top of a hill, and the view from the verandah was perfect; and yet it was with a sigh that Miss Carstairs closed the book she had tried so hard to read, and gave herself up to a reverie.

Never had been fairy pictures so utterly mistaken as those she had drawn of her uncle and his surroundings.

Reuben West was a splendid picture of an English yeoman.

When the mortgagees foreclosed, and his parents were turned from the farm they had leased for years, he went out to the colony, because he could not bear to labour as a servant on the land where he had ruled as a master.

He worked his way to Africa because he would not rob his parents of ever so little of the pittance that remained to him.

He had been engaged on an "up country" farm as soon as he landed; in a very short time found favour in his employer's eyes, and married his daughter.

Mrs. West died at her boy's birth, and her husband had never looked at a woman's face with anything but friendship since.

He prospered apace. He spent much of

his leisure in reading. He chose for his friends grave, thoughtful men, and the result was that at sixty Reuben West was a power in his adopted country.

He had a keen intelligence, an innate courtesy of manner, a clear judgment, and a ready wit.

Through all the years of his exile he had retained his old ideal of fashionable society, and yet there was no drawing-room in the colony whose mistress would not have felt honoured by his presence; and his grave, thoughtful face, and snow-white hair gave him a venerable appearance even beyond his years.

It was a very silent journey that the cousins performed from Cape Town to Spring Vale.

The doctor buried himself in a medical book, and paid no attention to Mona beyond providing in every way for her comfort.

The carriage which met them at Spring Vale was a model of ease, and the horses went at a splendid pace; but even here Norman never troubled himself to talk. It was only as they passed through his father's gates that he roused himself to say gravely, —

"I hope you'll take to my father. He has been very much pleased at the thought of your coming. His great wish has always been for a daughter."

"But he has your wife?" suggested Mona, quite forgetting only her fancy had told her the doctor was a married man. She knew she had made a mistake by the shadow that crossed his face; even before he said, coldly, —

"You have been so informed."

Mr. West was waiting in the hall, and his kiss of welcome solved Mona's doubts at once.

He, at least, was glad to have her. One look at his face, and the girl was full of a deep content. It was almost as though her own father had come back to her.

And the first impression was right. Reuben West was unforgotten and of the pretty, gentle girl, who soon learned to make sunshine in his home.

"You see, my dear," he told her, when she had only been a few days at Spring Vale; "I was delighted when your old schoolmistress wrote to me; but Norman made me put in that about my not liking fashionable young ladies. He declared that all English girls were stuck-up and had high notions."

"You don't think me stuck-up, Uncle Ben?" pleaded Mona, pitting one soft cheek against the old gentleman's. "Do you?"

"I think you the dearest little girl in the world! How that aunt of yours could bear to part from you I can't make out."

And, thus emboldened, Mona poured out her poor little history; and Reuben West listened, and told her she was his own child henceforward.

"I did not half like Miss Morris writing to you," confessed Mona. "It seemed like asking you to leave me."

The very remark Norman had made when he read the schoolmistress's letter.

"Well, my dear, I should have asked to have you long ago, had I known of your existence! I didn't keep up much correspondence with the old country; and when I did it was my sister Susan who answered my letters, and she was so angry about your mother's marriage she never mentioned her name after it."

"I thought Aunt Susan came out to live with you?"

"So she did, but she died before she reached Cape Town. My wife was an only child, and had no near relations left, so that you are actually the only kinswoman Norman had."

"And I think he'd be quite content without me," retorted Mona. "Uncle Reuben, why does Dr. West detest me so?"

"Surely you might call him Norman."

"Then why does Norman detest me?"

It was characteristic of Reuben West that he never protested Mona was mistaken.

"My boy is not used to young ladies, and does not know how to talk to them," was his reply.

"I believe he wishes I had never come."

"No. You are quite mistaken there, child. Norman is glad of anything that gives me pleasure."

And now time had passed on to the November afternoon when Mona sat on the verandah with that strange, unsatisfied expression.

She had been a month at Spring Vale, and knew everyone in the place. Her uncle petted her to her heart's content, the servants worshipped her, the neighbours were kind and friendly; in fact, the only person who seemed blind to her merits was her cousin Norman.

The doctor was the one drawback to Mona's felicity; but, unfortunately, he was a considerable one. He had an extensive practice, but his home was with his father, and Mona saw him continually.

They never advanced in the least to intimacy, but were as cold and formal as at their first meeting. He never expressed his disapproval of anything Miss Carstairs said or did, but he had a way of lifting his eyebrows occasionally, which perfectly exasperated Mona.

He was the only person among her new surroundings who ignored her, and Mr. West's adopted darling was not nearly so much and patient under such a slight as Miss Morris's pupil teacher would have been.

She had a kind and generous heart; so, seeing that the subject annoyed her uncle, after that one outburst she was careful not to mention Norman's indifference to him. She reserved her little thrusts, her cool stabs for the doctor when she saw him alone, and fully hoped Mr. West had forgotten the grievance until the night before we see her dreaming on the verandah, she chanced to overhear a conversation between the father and son, which robbed her of her decision.

"See is a dear little thing!" said Mr. West, evidently speaking of his niece; "and the image of her mother."

"Just about as heartless," returned the doctor. "I believe my aunt threw over her whole family at her lover's bidding, and Miss Carstairs bids fair to emulate her."

"I think you are very hard on the poor child, Norman. What do you mean?"

"Oh, there was a young fellow on board she was carrying on with nicely. The captain himself told me they all thought it would be a match, and I'm sure it looked like it."

"Well?"

"The moment she was seen with me I suppose it dawned on people to tell her of your wealth and position. My young lady sees at once a struggling artist is no fit match for her, and sends him to the rightabout."

"How can you tell?"

"Well, I have seen men in love a few times," said the doctor, coolly, "and if ever a fellow was pretty far gone in the madness it was Mr. Noel. You know yourself she has never mentioned his name, and there can't be anything between them, or he would write to her."

"I don't believe your cousin is heartless," said Mr. West, firmly. "The man may have been trifling with her."

"He was not a trifler. Besides, can't you see she makes eyes at any fellow she meets?"

"That's nonsense," cried the old gentleman, fairly vexed. "She does the honours of my house very prettily, and is civil to all my guests; but if you call her manner flirting, my boy, you can't have seen much of that pastime."

"And I'm sure I don't want to," said the doctor, wearily. "We'd better not talk of her, father. We shall never agree."

"I was so glad to have her," said Mr. West, gently, "and you know, my boy, it will make no difference to you. Whenever you find a wife this house is ready for her, and I will find another home for me and my little Mona."

"I wish you wouldn't harp on my marrying!" retorted Norman. "You may live a hundred years, father, but you'll never see my wife."

"It seems a pity," said Mr. West, thoughtfully. "You are depriving yourself of a great deal of happiness."

"At any rate, I know I am not deceived. I am not being accepted for my money."

"You think too much of money, my boy," said his father, sadly.

"I often wish we had not a shilling in the world," returned Norman. "So you see, sir, so far from grudging my cousin a share of your wealth, I am very much obliged to her for lifting part of my burden off my shoulders."

And this was the conversation Mona found so difficult to understand.

Until then she had honestly believed Norman West's coldness to her was the result of avarice, that being rich himself he grudged her a share of his father's wealth. Now she could not believe this any longer. There was the ring of truth in her cousin's voice as he declared he wished he had not a shilling.

On the other charge Mona was quite sure. She knew she had never "dropped" Mr. Noel, that, so far from scorning him when she heard of her uncle's fortune, they had parted as dear friends.

She knew, too, that she had never "flirted" in her life, if by flirting Norman meant trying to win an affection she did not intend to accept. Her cousin's satire did not hurt her, because she felt they were false; but two things did trouble her. Was Norman right, and had Mr. Noel really loved her? And why, oh! why, did her cousin say he should never marry?

Mona decided life would be a great deal pleasanter for her if a wife claimed all Dr. West's leisure. Perhaps, if she invited all the nicest girls in Spring Vale and threw them in his way he might change his mind. On the other point she was more doubtful.

She liked Mr. Noel very much. From the moment of their first meeting she had felt perfectly at ease with him, but she knew she did not love him.

Could it be love that had softened his voice whenever he spoke to her? Was it love that made him so eager for her promise to claim his aid in any trouble?

She was roused from her reverie by the noise of many footsteps, and looking over the verandah she saw two coloured servants leading Dr. West's horse, while her cousin himself followed slowly, leaning heavily on his partner's arm.

Mona was downstairs in a moment. However much she might dislike Norman she had all a true woman's sympathy for illness or trouble.

She was in the hall before the little procession arrived, and heard Dr. Beebie, the junior partner, a very quiet, studious young man, cry reassuringly, —

"Don't be alarmed, Miss Carstairs! He has had a bad fall from his horse, and his foot is sprained!"

"Broken!" came from Norman's white lips.

It was his only word; for the next moment he staggered heavily and would have fallen had not the coloured servants, taking in the danger, left the horse to his own desires, and helped Dr. Beebie to carry their young master into the dining-room and lay him on a sofa, where he neither moved nor spoke, much to Mona's concern.

"Surely he's not dead!" she asked, anxiously.

"Dead!" exclaimed the junior partner. "Bless me, no! He's only fainted; but it might have been a bad business. What possessed him to ride that horse so near the railway I can't think. She has a frightful temper, and always goes off into tantrums at the sight of a train."

Mona stood there white and scared. She did not like to go away, but she dreaded lest her cousin should open his eyes and find her there.

Fortunately, Dr. Beebie was a most commonplace, practical young man. He rapidly

decided Miss Carstairs would be a more efficient assistant than any of the servants; and so he coolly called her to help him in his proceedings, sending her for what he required as calmly as though she had been an apprentice in his surgery.

It was not very dreadful after all. The ankle was hopelessly broken, but it was soon set, and the lower part of the leg put in splints. Dr. Beebie surveyed his work with great complacency.

"It'll be a beautiful case," he said, gravely, "and West is just the fellow to set people an example. He won't be risking the use of his foot for the rest of his life by walking about too soon. He'll show people how to bear accidents. I should think you'd better have a bed made up for him in the library, Miss Carstairs. It opens into this room, you see, and the servants can wheel him in and out to meals. The driver, Moses, is a very handy fellow, I'll send him up, and he'll help the Doctor to bed presently."

"Do you mean he will be ill long?" asked Mona, seriously.

"He won't be able to put his foot to the ground under a month unless he is an idiot; but as to his being ill he'll suffer nothing in himself. He can be carried to a sofa when he's tired of lying in bed, and West was always a great one for reading. He'll do well enough. If you want to pity anyone, Miss Carstairs, please let it be me. I shall have all the sick people in the town on my hands, and as none of them have half the faith in me they have in my partner my life won't be very easy. I doubt if I shall be able to sit down to a meal with my wife and the children till West's about again."

For though only a junior partner, and possessing not a penny of private means, Dr. Beebie had been married nine years. He had five children, and a little dumping of a wife, who bored Mona excessively, and much bewildered that young lady to understand why Mrs. Beebie was the only woman in Spring Vale with whom her cousin Norman was on friendly terms.

"I really think," said Miss Carstairs, slowly, "that before you speak so certainly of his recovery you ought to bring him too. He's been insensible ever since you brought him home."

"Oh! that was all the better while the foot was being set. Spared him a good deal of pain. We'll soon see to him now."

He applied restoratives, but Norman West was a long time in "coming to," and when he at last opened his eyes his words were strangely incoherent.

"Send her away!" he said, irritably. "You know I have prayed never to see her face again."

Dr. Beebie looked at Mona, as though to enjoin her silence. Then he said, soothingly,—

"It's all right, old fellow! She's far enough away. I think you're dreaming!"

Mona had retreated to a position behind the sofa, where the patient could not see her without turning his head.

Norman seemed to recover himself by an effort.

"Is that you, Beebie? What's up?"

"Nothing worse than a broken ankle, if you keep quiet. Who did you take me for?"

"I thought Clara was here. You see what an idiot pain makes of a man."

"She's not here nor likely to be!" returned his partner. "Now, West, I am going to leave you in your cousin's hands. I'll look in again to-night!"

Left alone there came a long silence between Mona and the invalid. At last he said, faintly,—

"Pray don't trouble yourself to stay here. I shall do very well!"

But his voice was so weak that Miss Carstairs forgot her annoyance.

"I think you ought to have something to take!" she said briskly. "You know it is past five o'clock, and you were not in to lunch. Couldn't you swallow some soup?"

"I might."

She rang and gave the order. When it was brought she arranged the tray with deft fingers, and carried it to the sofa. Norman took all the soup, and looked at his cousin with puzzled eyes as she removed the basin.

"I should never have thought you could do that!"

"What?" laconically.

"Make one comfortable without a fuss," he returned. "Most women go into hysterics over accidents, if they care for the injured person, and ignore the affair altogether if they don't."

"I never met any woman like that," said Mona, as she deftly turned the Venetian blinds to keep out the summer sunshine.

"Don't trouble to stay here," said Norman.

"Dr. Beebie said you were not to be left alone, and Uncle Reuben is out," returned Mona, quickly. "I will stand in one of the servants if you prefer it, but I certainly shall not leave you alone."

"You must break it to my father gently," said Dr. West, giving up the point of her staying. "The dear old man always works himself up into an agony if I am ill!"

"I am sure you ought not to talk," reproved his nurse.

"It won't hurt me. My foot feels on fire. There is nothing else the matter."

"So Dr. Beebie said. He seemed to pity himself a great deal more than you!"

"That is his way, to hide his feelings. He has one of the kindest hearts."

"I am sure you ought not to talk," repeated Mona.

She thought he had obeyed her, for he relapsed into silence. And she believed him sleeping, but after a while he opened his eyes, after gazing wildly round the room cried, wildly,—

"Clara, Clara!"

Much alarmed Mona was certainly at a loss. She felt certain he was delirious, but could not bear to call in any of the servants to listen to his secrets thus unconsciously disclosed. She did not know who Clara was or what part she had filled in Norman's life, and so she just stood by his side, unwilling to leave him alone, and yet powerless to help him.

"Clara, Clara!" called the feverish voice, "where are you? Have you forsaken me? My head is on fire, I tell you, and it is your work!"

Very gently Mona laid her cool hand on his brow, which seemed to burn her fingers, then she whispered softly,—

"Clara is not here. Would you like her sent for?"

"I never want to see her again! Never, never! Oh, why do you look at me with her eyes? Send her away!"

"She is miles away," said Mona, repeating Dr. Beebie's words. "You may be quite certain she is not coming back!"

"She spoils my life. I forgave her that, but she has killed my faith in women! I shall never believe in one again! Never, never!"

Mona was feeling almost distraught. It was an untold relief to her when the door opened, and her uncle entered. He had met Dr. Beebie and heard from him of the accident, so the worst of her task was spared poor Mona.

"I am so glad you have come," she whispered. "He has been talking so wildly. I did not know what to do."

"Light-headed," said Mr. West, sadly, "but that is not unusual with him! I never met anyone with such a tendency to fever, and the moment it attacks him he is delirious!"

They stood together, uncle and niece, watching Norman's fevered tossing. He did not speak connectedly again, only now and again, by bending over him, the two anxious watchers could catch the one word,—

"Clara!"

"Who was she?" asked Mona.

"The curse of his life," answered Reuben

West, bitterly. "She was Kate Beebie's sister, but as unlike her as darkness from light. She and my boy were lovers, their wedding-day fixed, when she met some Englishmen at her aunt's house in Cape Town. One of them was a lord, and that girl would have sold her soul for a title. She slipped out unknown to her friends, and married him at the Cathedral one morning. Then they went on board the steamer and sailed for England the same day."

"Until the ship stopped at Madeira, and an acquaintance of ours, who happened to be on board, cabled out the news, we knew nothing of it. Norman sought her frantically, believing she had met with some accident. When her treachery was known here it almost cost her sister's life, and it changed my boy from a joyous light-hearted young fellow to the grave, studious man he is now!"

The tears stood in Mona's eyes.

"And he hates all women!" she said, brokenly. "No wonder, after such a betrayal!"

CHAPTER IV.

Mrs. CARSTAIRS replied to Miss Morris's letter courteously enough, saying she was much obliged to that lady for taking her troublesome niece off her hands. Then in a postscript, as though a mere afterthought, she asked whether Miss Morris knew of any young lady of position needing a refined home and fashionable society.

Down went the corners of Miss Morris's mouth as she read these lines.

"Then I was right, and she has been living beyond her income, and is in difficulties. Well, I'm sorry for her, but as to trusting any girl I cared for to her tender mercies that's quite a different thing. She had better secure a rich son-in-law as soon as possible. Why doesn't Sir Roland come home to marry his cousin if they 'understand each other?'"

That was what a great many other people were asking, the Miss Carstairs among the rest.

"You know, mamma," said Maude, the eldest of the trio, a haughty young woman of twenty-five, "Roland never said anything definite, and I really think it would be better to write to him and ask his intentions. Mary might have married Mr. Fortescue last year if she hadn't been so full of being 'my lady.' Eight hundred a year is not to be despised."

But unfortunately the rejected again had gone elsewhere for consolation, and found it.

The truth came sadly home to Mrs. Carstairs. Her youngest girl had been "out" three years. Maude, the eldest, had seen seven seasons, and yet the only ghost of an offer either of them had received was the one she had allowed Mary to refuse because it came from someone "connected with trade."

"We can't go on like this much longer," said the widow, with a groan. "I have spent every penny your father left me. I am in debt on every side, and I have nothing in the world to depend upon but my pension, which is only four hundred a year."

"It's shameful!" said Mary, groaning.

"Roland ought never to have deceived me."

"Are you sure you didn't deceive yourself?" demanded Maude, coldly. "I never noticed Roland paid you any particular attention. You were nearest to him in age, and so got paired off with him as children, but I never heard of anything else."

"He said he must go away because it was dangerous to stay," said Mary, desperately, "and he asked me always to think of him kindly."

"That doesn't imply he means to marry you," retorted Maude. "I think you have behaved like a simpleton."

"Come, girls, quarrelling won't mend matters," said their mother, with a sigh. "Just tell me what is to be done?"

"I shall write to Roland," said Maude, slowly.

"I don't think you are the proper person," objected Mary. "You were never his favourite."

"No, we squabbled continually, and so he can't think I am trying to catch him," said Miss Carstairs, with profound contempt for her sister. "I shall tell him mother's affairs are hopelessly entangled, and that as she has no son to help her she would be grateful if he could come and talk over things with her. But that if it is impossible for him to come to England it would be a great convenience to us to have the use of Carstairs Place for a few months."

"I thought we had the use of it?" objected Alice. "Didn't little Mona stay there ever so long?"

"We have the use of it so far that three rooms are kept aired in case we want them. But I don't mean that at all. If we go to Carstairs it must be with proper style, and power to throw the whole house open and entertain."

"But that would cost a lot."

"Roland, of course, would pay his own expenses, and I expect when ours heard we were living at the Place they would soon grow less threatening. Why, our cousin has ten thousand a-year if he has a penny."

"Double that," put in Mrs. Carstairs.

"His mother was an heiress. Roland must have a princely income, and being the last male heir, everything is in his power."

"Does that make any difference?"

"Yes. Your grandfather entailed the property on the eldest of his three sons and his descendants, but failing a direct male heir the reigning baronet was to have power to bequeath everything as he chose. It is a burning shame! As if Roland died childless you girls would be his natural heiresses."

"Hardly that," said Maude, who was very precise, "for Mona's father was older than papa. But it doesn't matter, mamma. Roland is sure to marry. Eligible young men always do."

The letter was written and despatched early in January (it was the arrival of the Christmas bills that had roused Mrs. Carstairs to the desperate condition of her affairs). It was sent to Sir Roland's lawyer, who was supposed always to have the baronet's address, accompanied by a polite note, urging speed in despatching it.

Mr. Tweedy answered by return of post. He had sent on Mrs. Carstairs' letter, but he feared some time might elapse before a reply could arrive, as his client was out of Europe.

"That's vague," said Maude, as she tossed the note into the wastepaper basket. "Really one would think Roland was a criminal flying from justice. He has been gone three years, and we have never had a definite address where we could write to him."

Two days later Mr. Tweedy's card was brought to the ladies as they sat at work. Mrs. Carstairs declared Sir Roland must have come home. Her daughters thought the lawyer brought a message from him, but all felt that no light cause had made the lawyer leave his office, and come up to South Kensington in the busiest part of the morning.

He was shown into them as they sat, for as not one of the girls would have heard of being excluded from the audience it seemed useless for him to be asked into another room.

It chanced that he had never met Mrs. Carstairs or her daughters. In fact, Roland had behaved rather strangely on coming of age, and dismissing his grandfather's lawyer had confided the entire management of his affairs to Mr. Tweedy, of whom no one had heard anything except that his son had been Roland's chum at college.

The lawyer was a man of fifty turned, shrewd and clear-headed. He probably took in a great deal of the characters of his new acquaintance, for he wasted no time in idle small-talk, but went direct to the purpose.

"I am sorry to say, madam, that I am the bearer of ill news. I heard this morning of my client's death. Sir Roland Carstairs died

at Cape Town on the tenth of December, of typhus fever, and the information has just reached me!"

The one thought in all those minds was, to whom had the dead man left his wealth, or—and this was a terrible idea—had he died intestate, and if so, could Mona's claims outweigh theirs?

"I had no idea Roland was in Africa," said his aunt at last. "What in the world took him there, away from all his kindred?"

"I rather fancy, poor fellow," said the lawyer, feelingly, "that his one object in leading a life of constant change was to prevent himself from forming any strong attachment, for under his painful circumstances he felt marriage would be a sin!"

Four pairs of eyes looked at Mr. Tweedy in bewilderment.

"Painful circumstances! Why, he had twenty thousand a-year!"

"And would have given every penny of it to have changed places with his meanest servant. Surely, Mrs. Carstairs, you must have heard of the family skeleton?"

"I know that Reginald Carstairs and his wife, Lady Adela, were grievously unhappy," said the widow, in a puzzled tone. "She was beautiful and high born. She brought him a noble fortune, and loved him dearly. Why their marriage was a failure always bewildered me."

"She is dead now, and her son rests in peace, so it can hurt no one to speak the truth. Lady Adela Carstairs died a raving lunatic. Her mother was insane, and she had been subject to fits of dementia from a child. Sir Reginald did his utmost for his grandson. He guarded against his learning even a hint of the fatal secret till he was of age. Then he caused the truth to be disclosed to him in a letter written by himself. In that letter, Mrs. Carstairs, your father-in-law urged his heir never to marry unless he felt absolutely certain he had not inherited his mother's curse!"

"He did not inherit it," said Mrs. Carstairs, sharply. "Roland had the sweetest temper."

"But subject from childhood to fits of gloom, which amounted almost to melancholia. He saw the first physicians for mental disorders in London and Paris, and all said the same thing. He might live to a good old age and never develop his mother's malady; but the seeds of it were dormant in his constitution, and any trouble or sudden shock would bring them into life. In my opinion, after listening to such a verdict, Sir Roland was right in taking (as he did the day he heard it) a solemn oath that nothing would induce him to marry."

"But to be cut off like that in the prime of his youth, it sounds terrible!" objected Mrs. Carstairs.

"Better so than to live to become a lunatic. Believe me, madam, he thought so. The one wish of his heart was to die young."

"And he expected it?" asked Mrs. Carstairs. "I have often heard him speak as a child as though he never fancied himself old."

"He did expect it," said the lawyer, quietly. "The day after he came of age he made a will (he was then travelling with my son) and sent it to me. It has been in my keeping ever since, and I never heard him express a wish to alter its disposition of his property; but the letter received this morning distinctly states that he made a second will at the commencement of his illness, which revokes the one in my possession."

"Who wrote to you?" asked Maude, abruptly.

"A Captain Peters. He commands one of the steamers sailing between Southampton and the Cape. I believe your cousin had travelled on his ship more than once. He writes of him with great feeling, and says that, as he hopes to be in England within a fortnight of his letter, he would prefer not to enter into business matters, but intends to call on me with

the will and other legal documents as soon as he reaches London."

"I daresay he has prevailed on Roland to leave him everything," said Mrs. Carstairs, spitefully. "Such a will made when the poor fellow was dying ought not to be allowed to stand."

"In that case one of your daughters would suffer," said the lawyer, dryly, "for she is his heiress."

"I thought you did not know the contents of the will," said Maude, sharply.

"Nor do I. Captain Peters specially says he prefers not to enter into details; but then, as an afterthought, he adds that to save any disappointment he thinks it best to state that Sir Roland's chief heiress is his cousin Mona. Which of you young ladies am I to congratulate?"

But, alas! neither of the three looked in a case for felicitation. If ever envy, hatred, and malice were stamped plainly on girls' faces, all these were written on those of the Misses Carstairs.

CHAPTER V.

NORMAN WEST did not die, though he was in a good deal more danger than his father had expected at first. He had led such an active, outdoor existence that the confinement had tried him terribly; and, besides the broken ankle, colonial fever seized on him and held him tightly in its cruel grip, so that for three or four weeks after that terrible November afternoon Mr. West's beautiful home was the abode of mourning and anxiety for his only son, tossed in all the wild delirium of fever, rarely being conscious all through that time, and only tranquil when in the stupor of exhaustion.

In vain good Dr. Beebie declared Norman would pull through. In vain his cheery little wife told Mona, in confidence, she had seen him far worse at the time of her sister's treachery.

Mona and her uncle worked themselves into a terrible state of anxiety until, as the Doctor told them good-naturedly, they were doing their best to make three invalids instead of one.

Mona was head nurse—a rather peculiar arrangement, since in health the cousins had never been on cordial terms, and all the feminine population of Spring Vale were dying to wait on the handsome Doctor; but from the moment of discovering his boy's ravings were less violent when Mona's voice soothed him, Mr. West had installed his niece in supreme authority, and she was too fond of the kind old man not to long to do her utmost for his son. It was entirely for her uncle's sake, she told herself. Besides, the story of "Clara" had softened her animosity against Norman. After suffering so cruelly through a woman's treachery he seemed to have earned a right to disparage the whole sex.

In fact, Mona's thoughts of "Clara" were harder than any she had cherished against her cousin.

She had all the instincts of a sick nurse, as, indeed, most true women have. It was quite impossible to go on hating anyone so completely at her mercy.

The old housekeeper, who had brought up Norman from babyhood, was a ready assistant; but even Mrs. Rolph admitted she could do nothing with her young master compared with his cousin.

The crisis came at last, and Norman was pronounced on the road to recovery. The fever light died out of his eyes. His ravings ceased, but he was weak and helpless as a child.

The first sign he gave of returning to himself was that his manner to Mona entirely changed. From always fretting if she left the room for an hour, and refusing to take food from any other hand, he ceased to notice her absence, and seemed equally indifferent to her presence. He never showed any plea-

sure in her little attentions. It was as though he had gone back to his old distrust.

Mona was divided in feeling on this sudden change. As a sign that Norman was recovering, she hailed it joyfully, but it hurt her to the quick to be scorned by one to whom, through so many anxious days and weeks, she had seemed absolutely indispensable. Good old Reuben West, who saw how her colour went and came in Norman's presence, took an opportunity to apologize for his son's ingratitude; but it was Dr. Beebie who remonstrated with the patient himself.

"Well, on the whole, West, I think you are the most ungracious fellow I ever had to do with, and I have seen a good many!" he said, one morning in December, when Norman's sofa had been wheeled on to the verandah for the first time, and he had answered some congratulatory remark of his cousin's with something like a grunt, sending her away with a tear in her eye, that did not escape Dr. Beebie's notice.

"You'd be ungracious if you'd been laid by like a log for five weeks!" was the quick reply, "but really, Beebie, I do know I have been an awful nuisance to you, and as soon as I am fit to go about without scaring the patients, I'll take them all off your hands, and you shall have as long a holiday as you like!"

"As though I complained of sick people's conduct to me," said Dr. Beebie, sharply. "Besides, we are old friends and comrades, and I was bound to do my best for you; but you don't owe your life to me, West, but I verily believe to your cousin's nursing!"

"Rabbi!"

"Miss Carstairs has tended you as devotedly as though you had been her brother, and you treat her—well, considerably worse than if she was one of your father's servants!"

"I'm sure I wish she had spared her trouble," said Norman, wearily. "I don't know that I care much about life!"

"That is cowardly!"

"Oh, of course, you can talk. You've one of the sweetest wives in the world, and—"

"And she is sister of the falsest woman I ever knew," remarked the other doctor, coolly. "If that does not convince you all women are not heartless, because you happen to have stumbled across a bad specimen, I know nothing that will!"

"I meet nothing but bad specimens."

"Pray, are you still fretting after Lady Mervyn?" asked Beebie, who felt the time had come for plain-speaking. "I believe she contemplates a divorce, so you might have a chance of succeeding the Earl!"

"Do you mean to insult me?"

"By no means. I want to find out as your doctor, and still more as your friend, what you are grizzling over, or what makes you so savage with us all."

"I wouldn't marry Lady Mervyn if she came to me a widow, and implored me on her bended knees. I can't think what makes you imagine I am fretting over her."

"Because you raved of hardly anything else while you were ill," said his friend, dryly. "I can assure you, poor Miss Carstairs must have grown quite weary of Clara's name!"

"They are very much alike," said Norman, dreamily.

"Alike! No two women were more different. Clara was a born coquette. Your cousin is just a simple, true-hearted girl. I'm sure, Norman, you treat her shamefully."

"I don't like her!"

"Why not? Surely you can't be jealous of her share of your father's heart?"

"No. The old man enjoys her society intensely, but she is false as she is fair! Before ever she came to Spring Vale, Beebie, I understood that much!"

"Indeed! Well, I think you were mistaken. My wife is not often wrong, and she is quite in love with your cousin!"

"Doesn't she see the resemblance to her sister?"

"Of course not. No one does but you."

"I wish I had been a poor man," said Norman, fretfully, "then I might have made something of my life. Now I shall never believe any woman accepted me for anything but my wealth."

Mona did not come back to the verandah. In truth, Dr. Beebie met her as she was leaving the house, told her she looked like a little ghost, and insisted on carrying her off to spend the rest of the day at his house.

"Do you think Norman is going to have a relapse?" asked Miss Carstairs, anxiously, as they drove off. "He seems to be very low this morning."

"Convalescents are often fretful. I've been giving him a good scolding. You yield to his whims too much. He would be better if you sat upon him sometimes."

"But I don't know how to—and I feel so sorry for him."

"My dear Miss Carstairs, you need not be. He'll be as strong as ever in a month."

"You know that is not what I mean. His heart is broken by her treachery."

"His heart is not broken in the least, and he would not marry Lady Mervyn if she were a widow to-morrow. The truth is, Miss Carstairs, he has grown almost morbid on the subject. He distrusts every woman because one jilted him. He wants a remedy I can't give him."

"What is it, doctor?"

The doctor carefully avoided meeting Mona's eyes as he answered,—

"To fall desperately in love. Nothing else will cure him of his absurd fancies."

Mona spent the rest of the day at the Beebie's, and her cousin found the hours drag far more than usual. His father sat with him all the afternoon, and even volunteered to read the paper. But his voice was monotonous, and the invalid stopped him.

Mrs. Rolph came in for a share of his complaints. The tea was smoky, and she touched his injured foot when she removed the tray (both imaginary complaints). He further-more refused to be wheeled indoors, and would not hear of going to bed at his usual time.

"Well, I wish Miss Mona was here," said the irate housekeeper, who, having been the invalid's nurse from his babyhood, did not scruple to speak her mind. "She bears all your tantrums like an angel, but I don't mean to, I'd sooner have to tend a sick bear than you."

Norman smiled in spite of himself.

"Where is Mona, by the way?"

"Gone to Mrs. Beebie's, and it's time she did have a change somewhere, poor dear young lady, for you've worn her to skin and bone nearly with your tantrums. And really, Mr. Norman, what're to do without Miss Mona when she goes I can't think. The master's as mopy as possible because he had his tea without her. When she's married the house'll be as dull as ditch water, and yet she's too bonny to be an old maid."

Norman declined to give an opinion on this point. He went off to bed at nine o'clock in the worst possible humour, and even then Mona had not returned.

Perhaps Dr. Beebie's advice that the patient should be judiciously thwarted a little influenced Miss Carstairs, for she grew rather lax in her attentions. She began to make her uncle her first care, as she had done before the accident, and either by accident or design for three whole days she was never entirely *tête-à-tête* with Norman.

But Dr. West did not like the new arrangement, and by having his sofa wheeled on the verandah an hour earlier than usual on the fourth morning, he came upon Mona feeding the canaries and singing almost as blithely as themselves.

"Why do you never come near me?" Dr. West asked, rather sulkily, when the "boy" who pushed his sofa had retired.

"Well, to tell you the truth, I thought you had had rather an overdose of my society."

"Do you know Beebie says you saved my life?"

"He happens to be a great friend of mine, so you must allow for a little exaggeration."

"I don't believe you care a bit."

"I do," said Mona, slowly. "I think if anything had happened to you it would have broken your father's heart."

"You could have consoled him."

"You overrate my powers," said Mona, cheerfully. "But as you are almost well again we need not discuss that. Dr. Beebie says you will be as strong as ever in a month."

"He's an idiot!"

"You seem fond of that expression," said Mona, coolly. "Do you know, Norman, when I first saw you on board the *Grecian* before I knew who you were, I told Mr. Noel you looked terribly bad-tempered—and I rather think I was right."

"I wonder you like to mention his name."

"Why? He was very kind to me."

"And you treated him shamefully."

Mona opened her eyes.

"I don't think he would say so. We were great friends. He had known my father long ago, and when we parted Mr. Noel made me promise if ever I was in any trouble to write to him. It seems strange," she went on, dreamily, "but though I had only seen him those three weeks I felt as though I had known him all my life."

Norman stared at her.

"You sound as if you meant it," he said, bitterly; "but perhaps you are only deceiving me. Can you look me in the face and say that you were not engaged to Noel?"

"Most certainly," said Mona, quietly.

"To begin with, he never wished to marry me, and to go on with, I am old-fashioned and believe in love. I liked Mr. Noel extremely. I trusted him as if he had been my brother, but I—did not love him."

Norman looked amazed.

"I thought you were engaged, and that when you found out my father's wealth you thought you might look higher, and so cast him off."

Mona had grown pale as death.

"I shall ask Uncle Reuben to pay my passage back to England," she said, slowly, "and go to Miss Morris. I am stronger than I used to be, and perhaps she would let me be one of her teachers again now. I can't stay in this house."

"Why not? My father worships you."

"And you grudge me his every kindness. You think me a heartless coquette, who gave up a good man's love for the sake of being the *protégée* of rich relations. If I had cared for Mr. Noel—like that, and he had asked me, I should have married him if he had been as poor as a church mouse."

"You mustn't go," said Norman, passionately. "My father could never spare you. I could not."

"You would be delighted to get rid of me. You hate me."

"I have tried hard enough to," he answered, "and the result is that I love you better than anything in the world. Mona, if I shunned you it was because I knew my own danger. I have known for days that you were more precious to me than ought on earth."

"Dr. Beebie said nothing would cure you of your morbid fancies but falling in love. I agreed with him then," said Mona, demurely, "but I object to the form in which you have taken the prescription."

"Mona!"

"We should be miserable!" said the girl, gravely. "Your suspicions would make my life a torture!"

"Do you believe I love you?" he demanded, passionately.

"I think it costs you too much to confess it for you to say it if it were not true."

"And do you hate me?"

"One does not hate one's cousins."

"That won't do! Mona, I will be answered. I mean to know! Do you hate me?"

"Not particularly."
"Then will you go a step further, and try to love me? Mona," as he caught a strange look in her beautiful face, "do you mean that you care already, that in trying to save my worthless life you have grown to like me?"

Mona's face was hidden, but Dr. West persisted in his question.

"I could not help it," she said at last, blushing crimson. "I was so sorry for you, and so angry with that 'Clara'!"

"I have forgiven Clara weeks ago! If you were angry with her, Mona, you must not follow her example by trying to make me miserable!"

"I want you to be happy!"

"And I can't be happy without you! Mona, I have treated you like a brute, but I love you dearly!"

"I believe love often begins with a little aversion," said Mona, gravely. "Perhaps, in your case, it will also end with it!"

"Mona!"

"You must never speak of this again!"

"But why not?"

"Because it is impossible!"

"You confess you love me?" he protested.

"I am afraid I do; but there is a great barrier between us. You are rich, I am penniless. You are the most doubting man I ever heard of; and, if I married you, in a few weeks you would persuade yourself your fortune had bought me! I had rather not risk it, Cousin Norman!"

"Mona!"

"I can't help it!" said the girl, decidedly. "If you began to doubt me after I was your wife you would break my heart, and so I won't give you the chance of saying I married you for your money!"

The servant interrupted their *tête-à-tête* by bringing Mona a card.

"Captain Peters!" she exclaimed. "I knew the *Grecian* was in Table Bay. How very kind of him to come, especially as they sail to-morrow!"

But it was no call of mere friendship. Captain Peters had been summoned the day before, when his ship reached Table Bay, to the death-bed of Mr. Noel, otherwise Sir Roland Noel Carstairs.

He had received his dying wishes, and taken charge of his last will.

By some mistake another vessel had been "put on" instead of the *Grecian* for the next voyage, and so her captain had a fortnight of comparative freedom, and the first use he made of it was to come to Spring Vale, and tell Mona of the wondrous change in her fortune, since the dead man had left her everything he had, save a small provision for his servants.

It was much the same story as Mr. Tweedy had carried to her cousins, only there was an addition they would never know.

"I believe that had the poor fellow felt free to marry he would have begged you to be his wife," said Captain Peters, kindly, "and this much I may tell you, he loved you with all his heart and strength. Your name was the last on his lips!"

"Oh! why did he not tell me he was my cousin?"

"Poor fellow! He thought it easier to keep his oath if he never used his title. For the same reason he never betrayed his wealth. Most people thought him a needy artist."

"I know. My cousin, Dr. West, did!"

"Ah! Captain Peters was not blind to the crimson blush on the girl's face. 'He's a fine fellow. Don't you think so? And so he fancied poor Noel was a struggling artist. Perhaps he went a little further, and thought you were lovers. Do you know, Miss Carstairs, every one on board saw the poor fellow's devotion to you? Had you been one whit less simple and unconscious you must have seen it for yourself.'"

Mona's eyes were full of tears.

"Uncle is out," she said, gently; "but my cousin is on the verandah. He would like to see you!"

Captain Peters followed her through the glass doors, and took a seat at the invalid's side. The sailor had seen quite enough to guess at the romance going on at Spring Vale, so when Mona vanished he was not disappointed at the question.

"What have you been saying to her? She was crying!"

"I only came to tell her of a noble heart who died blessing her, and to tell her that her sweet, girlish faith and friendship had brought a little brightness into a sorely-burdened life!"

"You mean Noel! I always said he cared for her. Why didn't he tell her so?"

The Captain explained, but—perhaps from design—forgot to add that Miss Carstairs was Sir Roland's sole heiress. Presently, when Mr. West had come in and taken the visitor to see the garden, Mona came softly back.

"His was a more unselfish love than mine," said Norman, gravely. "Dear," taking her hand, tenderly, "don't you think you can trust me? If not I believe I shall have to petition the dear old man to leave all his money-bags to someone else. I can do without riches, but I cannot give up Mona!"

"I don't think you will have to try," said Mona, softly. "Since I know how Roland thought of me I feel brave. Norman, if you wish it still I will risk even your fancying I have accepted you for your money!"

When Norman West heard the truth, and knew that Mona had been conscious of her wealth when she gave him her promise, he declared he had been taken in, and that she would be doubting him now; but Mona said, gravely, she did not care for money, but she was glad he could never suspect her of mercenary thoughts.

"Hem!" said Dr. Beebie, when he heard of the engagement, "it's the best news you could have told me, but you had got things to a pretty deadlock, young people! Please remember twenty thousand a year does not always come to young ladies who are afraid to accept a rich suitor because he has more money than themselves."

Reuben West was delighted, and urged a speedy wedding, but Mona wished to wait until Roland's grave was not so freshly made. And thus it came about that the marriage was delayed till March, and then the bridal pair went to England for their honeymoon, to inspect the glories of Carstairs Place, and to make a provision for Mona's aunt and cousins.

Norman called this provision "coals of fire," but in his heart he was proud that his wife's first use of her prosperity should be to benefit the relations who had shown her so little kindness. An annuity of five hundred pounds was settled on "Aunt Mary," and a portion of five thousand pounds promised to each of her daughters when they married (those three portions are still undaimed).

The pleasantest visit of all was paid to St. Roman's. Fortunately Easter fell late, and the school was still enjoying holidays, so that there was nothing indecorous in the presence of the bridal pair.

"Wonders will never cease," said Miss Morris, as she kissed her ex-pupil teacher. "Why, Dr. West, what strange changes happen! It is not a year since I went to Petherbert Place to tell Mrs. Carstairs of Mona's failure, and listened to her complaints at being burdened with a poor relation!"

[THE END.]

A NEW method for ventilating railway carriages, and preventing dust from entering with the air, has lately appeared in France. The more quickly the train moves, the more rapidly the apparatus works. The air is made to traverse a receptacle containing water, which cools it and relieves it of dust; after which it goes through another filtering before entering the carriage.

FACETIÆ.

—C—

MUCH charity that begins at home is too feeble to get out of doors.

EVERY dog has his day. The nights, however, are still reserved for cats.

MAN MILLINER: "The bonnet, miss, makes you look twenty years younger." Lady Customer: "How funny! I must appear in it like a girl of ten years."

"A very good sort of man" is often another term for "rather a poor creature;" and to praise a man's honesty is a favourite way of insinuating dullness.

"Was your watchman well recommended?" "Oh, not directly. I used to see him in church, and as he stayed awake all through Dr. Sonora's sermons, I concluded he was the man I wanted."

NEW PARLOUR MAID: "Here's a letter ma'am, if you please." Mistress: "Pray, Mary, are you not accustomed to see letters handed on a tray?" "Yes, ma'am; but I didn't know if you was."

LADY DE PRIMAROSE: "What do you think of the new duchess?" Mrs. Normanby: "Oh, she's a perfect phonograph!" "I don't understand. What do you mean?" "Well, you see, she speaks without thinking."

PAPA: "How are you progressing in your language lessons, Ethel?" Ethel: "Oh, I have learned to say 'Thank you' and 'If you please' in French." Tommy: "That's more than you ever learned in English."

YOUNG Lady, (to a gentleman): "Pick up my fan, hand me a chair, and get me a glass of water." Gentleman (indignant): "Do you take me for a servant?" Lady (serenely): "No, I mistook you for a gentleman!"

ETHEL (aged five, who is being put to bed, when her mother, in evening toilet, enters the room): "Are you going to bed, too, mamma?" Mother: "No, dear, I'm going to the opera." "Are you going to dress after you get there?"

EVERY THIRTY DAYS.—LOBESOM: "Been married a month to-day, haven't you, old fel? Still billing and cooing, I suppose?" SARGE (dubiously): "I am not cooing as much as I was at one time, but the billing—ah me!"

INJURED INNOCENCE: "Police magistrate (to tough-looking customer): 'If you did not steal this watch, as you claim, how does it happen you were found with it hidden in your bootleg?' Prisoner (baughtly): 'That's where I always carry my watch, your honour!'"

SERGEANT: "You are the most stupid soldier in the whole regiment. Have you any brothers?" Recruit: "Yes, I have a brother." "Is he as stupid as you?" "Yes, and a great deal more." "That's hardly possible. What does the donkey do for a living?" "He is a sergeant."

MARY (a good girl, but just a little huffed because mistress will not buy her a clock for the kitchen): "If you please, ma'am, can I have your watch to boil the eggs by?" "Oh, you don't want that, Mary—you've got an egg-boiler." "Oh, course, m'm; but, if you please, it's a quarter of an hour fast."

UNCLE SAM: "What is liberty?" Labour: "That which organised labour wishes to achieve." Uncle Sam: "What is slavery?" Capital: "That which organised labour wishes to impose." Uncle Sam: "What is organisation?" Both (shouting): "A union for the purpose of destroying everything opposed to you."

GROCER: "Yes, I want a pair of grocery scales, but—ahem—!" Hardware Dealer: "Oh, the weights are all right. We have a hole in the bottom of each one to be filled up with lead. No pound weight will go over fourteen ounces until filled up." Grocer: "Ah, I see. Very well, sir. Your honour evidently understands its business. Send me the scales."

SOCIETY.

FRANK FIGHTING in the Antipodes is, it seems, the latest field for aristocratic labour. It is said to be at once exciting, healthy, and remunerative.

THE Duc d'Orleans has become considerably stouter during his imprisonment, and now bears a striking resemblance to the best-known of his Bourbon ancestors.

A DRESSMAKER must be a born artist, able herself not only to create, but to choose well among the creations of others.

THE Queen has had many alterations made at Balmoral recently, and occupied several hours of the first days of her stay at the Castle in inspecting these improvements.

THE speciality of Vienna dressmakers is the number of whitebones they put in every dress body. Each body contains at least twenty whitebones—the wearer is a kind of female Jonah.

VELVET ribbon begins to be seen round the throat, and can be fringed with pearls or decorated with diamonds, much to general advantage.

LOSE gold chains, studded at regular intervals with pearls or small lapis-lazuli beads, are fashionable for day wear, and from these depend either watch, gold eyeglass, or mirror, that is tucked away in the folds of the corset.

AMONG queer fads of collectors are those of collecting circus posters, and portraits of riders, coins, bindings, artists' proofs, and all kinds of bric-a-brac. There is said to be an enthusiast who has begun to gather voices on phonographic cylinders.

RUMOUR has it that Lady Colin Campbell is about to appear as an actress, and that New York will probably be honoured with the first taste of her quality. We are accustomed to strange rumours in these days, but the spectacle of a sister-in-law of one of the Queen's daughters as a professional actress ought to draw.

THE eight horses which are attached to the Queen's carriage upon state occasions are of the famous Hanoverian breed—big, stalwart creams. These horses are still bred in Hanover, and the severest pains are taken to keep the stock pure. If at birth the colt is not a pure cream, or if, subsequently, it develops some defect, it is killed. In this way none but sound and distinct coloured horses are to be met with in this peculiar breed.

AT the theatres in New York some of the alert girls wear a black waistcoat with three buttons, displaying the largest possible expanse of snowy shirt front, and the high collar and white bow are an exact reflection of the gleaming and starched articles that have so long formed the mainstay of full-dressed masculinity.

THE Queen has displayed her usual tact in the choice of a title for her grandson. As Duke of Clarence and Avondale and Earl of Athlone, His Royal Highness will be a triply representative peer, England, Scotland, and Ireland each furnishing its quota to his new title. May it be a happy augury of the young Duke's popularity.

FASHION dictates curious changes. Once it was the vogue to walk in the Row between twelve and one. Then the favourite time slipped a little down the clock, and no really smart people ventured to appear before one o'clock. During this year, however, the change has been retrogressive, and now it is the really select thing to promenade at about 9.30 in the morning. Of course, at that hour tag-rag and bobtail are still at breakfast, all unconscious of the fact that the Row is then smart and select, that chairs can be had without difficulty, and that the riding path is occupied by those who really ride for pleasure, and not merely by those pretty and doubtful horsebreakers, who seem to ride for husbands for years without succeeding in their quest.

STATISTICS.

THE average human life is thirty-one years. The first tobacco-pipe manufactory was established in 1690.

NO more than one couple in 10,000 live to celebrate their diamond wedding—the sixtieth anniversary of their marriage.

IN the ten years ending 1889 the sales of Dickens's works by the firm of Chapman and Hall alone, exclusive of the enormous number produced and sold by those publishers who have availed themselves of the expiration of copyright, amount to 1,952,092 volumes.

TO give vividness to 1,000,000 years, Darwin, in "Origin of Species," page 269, gives this: "Take a narrow strip of paper, 84 feet 4 inches in length, and stretch it along the wall of a large hall; then mark off at one end the tenth of an inch. This tenth of an inch will represent 100 years, and the entire strip a 1,000,000 years."

GEMS.

THE children of to-day will be the architects of our country's destiny in 1900.

IF you cannot do a kind deed, speak a kind word; if you cannot speak a kind word, think a kind thought.

FRIENDSHIP should be surrounded with ceremonies and respect, and not crushed into a corner. Friendship requires more time than poor busy men can usually command.

ANGER is the most impotent passion that accompanies the mind of man; it effects nothing it goes about; and hurts the man who is possessed by it more than any others against whom it is directed.

LET no man fancy that he can deliberately try to worry another without entailing a much greater degree of worry upon himself. If every one realised this there would be fewer private quarrels to settle and far fewer lawsuits to adjudge.

THERE is an oblique way of reproof which takes off the sharpness of it, and an address in flattery which makes it agreeable, though never so gross; but of all flatterers the most skilful is he who can do what you like without saying anything which argues he does it for your sake.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

BANANA PIE.—Line a deep pie plate with crust, slice the bananas and fill the plate, sprinkling each layer with lemon juice and sugar. Cover with crust and bake.

LAND CUTLETS.—Trim cutlets carefully, lay them in a little warm butter for half an hour, turning them several times; then broil them on a gridiron, using care that they do not drip into the fire; butter, pepper and salt each one, place on a warm platter, garnish with parsley and lemon.

BAKED FISH: MACKEREL.—Wash and wipe carefully, make a dressing as for baked cod or haddock, stuff with this, dredge with salt and flour, and bake often with butter and water; make a gravy with the water in the pan in which the fish was baked, adding a little Worcester sauce. Serve baked mackerel with asparagus and mashed potatoes.

TO BOIL ASPARAGUS.—Allow one tablespoonful of salt to one-half gallon of water; scrape clean all the white part of the stalks, and place the asparagus in cold water for half an hour; tie them in bundles, and put them into a muslin bag to preserve the tops, and cook in the salted water until tender; place thin slices of toast in the bottom of a dish, butter them well, and place the asparagus on them, and pour a butter sauce over the whole.

MISCELLANEOUS.

SMALL diamonds fixed in the front and back sights of rifles are said to enable the marksman to take good aim even in a bad light.

SURE for breach of promise have become so common in England, with only frivolous pretexts for action, that a bill to abolish them has been introduced in the British Parliament.

A RUSSIAN ukase has just been issued, permitting the employment of women on railroads. On the Trans-Caspian line there are female station masters, traffic managers, signal women, and point women.

AN Algerian valley has been turned into a date-plantation. Oases have been formed by sinking artesian wells, nine hundred acres of desert land have been brought under cultivation, and fifty thousand palms planted.

SEVEN Waterloo veterans only have responded to the invitation given them by General van Merlan of Haarlem to celebrate the approaching seventy-fifth anniversary of the battle. The oldest of them was born in 1793, and the youngest in 1798. Six out of the seven are in a state of complete destitution.

A STRANGE and unjust law prevails in Italy in regard to military duty. A father is held accountable for a son's desertion; and when the latter fails to report himself for military service, and cannot be found, the father is imprisoned. A young Italian in Waldoboro, Me., lately returned to Italy, to save his father from a term of imprisonment.

THE celebrated tun at Konigstein is said to be the most capacious wine cask in the world—holding 1,669,236 pints. The top is raised in, affording room for twenty persons. A Latin inscription on the "Welcome Cup" invites the drinker to drink to the prosperity of the whole universe. This enormous tun was built by Frederick Augustus, King of Poland, in 1725.

THE English residents of Johannesburg, South Africa, are in a bewildering predicament. The Civil Commissioner has ordered that only the Dutch language shall be spoken in his court. Therefore the English, who compose the bulk of the population, must talk Dutch when they appear before him, or hire an interpreter. It is rumoured that the commissioner has an "understanding" with the interpreter; which means that he is the interpreter's silent partner.

HOWEVER unsightly a monster the threatened "Watkin Tower" may prove to be, we need not grumble at it if it can really be employed as a means of bringing down fresh air from the regions of cloudland, and "lawing it on" to our houses like water or gas. This is what science is seriously promising to do for us, and, if it really can be done, I don't think we should have cause to complain if two, or three, or even half-a-dozen "Towers of Babel" were erected in different parts of our smoky city.

AN erect bodily attitude is of vastly more importance to health than most people generally imagine. Crooked bodily positions, maintained for any length of time, are always injurious, whether in the sitting, standing or lying posture, whether sleeping or waking. To sit with the body leaning forward on the stomach or to one side, with the heels elevated on a level with the hands, is not only in bad taste, but exceedingly detrimental to health; it cramps the stomach, presses the vital organs, interrupts the free motion of the chest, and enfeebles the functions of the abdominal and thoracic organs, and, in fact, unbalances the whole muscular system. Many children become slightly hump-backed or severely round-shouldered by sleeping with the head raised on a high pillow. When any person finds it easier to sit or stand or walk or sleep in a crooked position than a straight one, he may be sure his muscular system is deranged, and the more careful he should be to preserve an upright position.

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

GLORIOUS.—English.

ANXIOUS DICK.—It is not possible to buy a commission in the army.

JAMIE.—The first International exhibition was held in London, in 1851.

MARION.—In 1891 Whit-Sunday will fall on May 17, and in 1892 on June 5.

ANTHONY.—The company has no doubt power to cut off the supply without notice on default in payment.

BEYTON.—If the "dirty marks" are greasy, a little French chalk scraped over them will absorb the grease.

INQUIRER.—A foundation-stone is laid when building begins; a memorial stone often when it is practically built.

ANNOTED.—If a cab proprietor agrees to send a cab at a fixed time, he is liable for the consequences if the cab is late.

J. M.—If the luggage was labelled and given into the charge of a servant of the company, they are responsible for its loss.

AN INTERESTED ONE.—"Massage" is a cure by rubbing. We can make nothing of the other word you have written.

B. R.—Notice to a workman must expire at the end of a week. The usual notice is a week, but it differs in different trades.

DOLLY.—The 16th June, 1866, fell on a Saturday; the 6th October, 1867, on a Sunday; and the 2nd April, 1869, on a Friday.

RECURIT.—The full-dress head-dress of the Royal Artillery is a bushy with white plume in front and scarlet bag on right side.

J. RAMER.—You cannot turn your furniture over to your wife, even with the aid of a lawyer, so as to defeat the claims of your creditors.

GOODALL.—A constable is entitled to arrest any person on suspicion that he is a deserter, and if his suspicion proves incorrect no damages can be claimed.

OTYIC.—The gentleman has an exceedingly fine head. He should be very clever, if there is any truth in phrenology. He is handsome, too, with very expressive eyes.

TOKEV.—No coin bears the superscription you describe. What you have found is some jubilee medal or token, worth a good deal less than the stipence you say it resembles.

TRENTHAM.—The word "boycotting" comes from Captain Boycott, a land agent in Ireland, who was first of those subjected to the process of "exclusive dealing" by his neighbours.

ADA SPOOKS.—You had better get the opinion of a lawyer. In ordinary cases the widow would claim one-third after all debts were paid. The children would share the rest equally.

LEARNER.—The speed of electricity along any wires in existence is instantaneous from point to point. There is no appreciable time, for instance, between Great Britain and America in telegraphing.

BOB.—The name is pronounced as you indicate, in three syllables, with the accent on the first. No educated person pronounces it "Har-on-lee," although some good and respectable people so pronounce it.

INQUISITIVE.—When being crowned our kings and queens must sit on the Coronation Chair, which contains the stone on which the kings and queens of Scotland were long ago crowned at Soane, near Perth.

STUPID BOB.—The meaning of the name Buenos Ayres is just good air, or fine climate, and if it were not that the city is occasionally scourged with yellow fever it would be one of the most desirable residences in the world.

A LOSER.—You may rest assured that if the registered letter was not returned to you it was delivered into the hands of the person to whom you addressed it, but write to the Postmaster-General, St. Martin's-le-Grand, on the subject.

TRIOUBLED KATE.—A doctor is not bound to attend a patient though called upon; but if a person were to die for want of the assistance which he could have rendered, he would certainly fall under the severest public censure.

FUGELER.—A British sovereign is worth 20 marks, 42½ pfennigs of German money; the mark is worth 11½d. Change your money at Cook's (the tourist) office before setting out, and get rid of any remaining at same place when you return.

CONSTANT READER.—The Duke of Cambridge's marriage was quite legal, and his children are legitimate, though they cannot succeed to his title; but as the lady was not of royal rank she could not take the title of Duchess nor be received at Court.

TERENCE.—John Lucas, the English painter, born in London, July 4, 1807, was originally an engraver in miniature. He became a portrait painter in 1839. It is stated that more than sixty of his works have been engraved. It seems to be conceded that one of his best productions is a portrait group, representing Robert Stephenson, Brunel, and other famous engineers, engaged in a consultation prior to the raising of the last section of the tubular bridge over the Menai Strait, a channel of Wales. He died in London, April 30, 1874.

INVALID.—Epidemics, such as influenza, are said to arise when the supply of ozone to the air is insufficient. To counteract this, Dr. Fu ster, of Berlin, has recently advocated the artificial supply of ozone to the air of towns and thickly-populated districts.

T. SIMS.—Quite legal for a member of a school board to act and vote who has a son or daughter under the same board—as teacher, we presume, you mean—except on an occasion when the engagement of his son or daughter is in any form under discussion.

GOLDEN LOCKS.—According to an English barber, frequent washings of the head will produce baldness. Another important agent in causing baldness is the use of fancy toilet soaps in shampooing the head. A good brush and comb are sufficient to keep the head clean.

MOLLIE.—Your course is clear enough. Sit down and write to the man, stating that except he sends you a full and frank apology of his misconduct, with absolute retraction of his slanderous statements, you will put the case into the hands of an agent, and tell him to proceed for damages.

OLD READER.—Works first came into use in Italy about the fifteenth century, but they were not in common use until about two hundred years ago. The ancients, in the absence of forks, ate with their fingers, holding their meat with the left hand while they cut it with a knife in the right.

SUFFERER.—Bathing will no doubt assist you, but not bathing the head merely; that is more likely to aggravate your ailment. A bath all over with water barely tepid, and a good rub with a rough towel afterwards, is what is wanted, in addition to a tonic likely to strengthen your system.

L. R.—No difference between life and natural life in a sentence, except that natural life may suggest to a prisoner that he has a spiritual life which need not be affected by the sentence if the prisoner takes advantage of the opportunity for reflection which that seclusion in the prison affords to the willing.

PHILOSOPHY.

When worries and troubles surround you,
Don't fret.

Go to work!
You will always have trouble around you,
You bet!

If you sulk,
The man who is busy his worry forgets;
His mind isn't harassed by thoughts of his debts,
And the harder he works, the more happy he gets.
Till he's gay as a Turk.

If Fortune won't smile, let her frown, if
She will.

Never mind!
Don't sulk, and look wholly cast down, if
She still

Seems unkind.
If you smile at her soon she will smile back at you.
You are certain to win her, if you will pursue
Her with cheerful persistence and hope ever new,
And then solace you'll find.

The world doesn't care for your woes,
Oh, no

Not a bit!
The man who is wise never shows
His foe

That he's hit.
Every one of his neighbours has griefs of his own,
He greatly prefers to let your griefs alone,
And he doesn't at all enjoy hearing you groan,
So take warning and quit!

L. B.

WOULD-BE ARTIST.—Before using the canvas on which most oil paintings are made, it is usually primed, or covered with a preparation of chalk and size, or of white lead, which, when dry, is ground until its surface is smooth. It is also generally stretched on wooden frames of the size of the picture.

B. GIBSON.—Yes, charcoal powder is a laxative, and is useful in cases of indigestion or constipation. The dose for an adult is one tablespoonful, mixed with honey, milk, or cold water. It is also good for correcting acidity of the stomach, and sweetening the breath. It has also proved of great benefit in cases of neuralgia.

WELL TRIED.—We have no reason to doubt the efficacy of the system. The worst that has been said about it is that it is not the production of the man who gives his name to it, but that it is not a matter that need concern you. Then we may remind you that any system is better than none to you, and this one seems better than most.

ANY T.—An old and excellent remedy for weak eyes is a strong decoction of chamomile, boiled in fresh cow's milk. Bathe the eyes with it several times a day, and let the liquid be as warm as the eyes can bear without uneasiness. It may take several weeks to prove of positive benefit, but the patient will in time be rewarded for his or her trouble.

BAROL.—"George Sand" was Marie Dudevant, whose Christian name was Amantine Lucile Aurora Dupin. She was a daughter of Maurice Dupin, an army officer. She married Mr. Dudevant, also an officer of the army, from whom she separated about ten years afterwards. As stated to other correspondents, the name of "Sand" was assumed in consequence of a friendship she formed with a young student named Jules Sandeau. Her first novel, *Indiana*, "Jules Sand," was subsequently changed to "George Sand."

GOSLING.—Goose feathers, when carefully collected and dirty, may be cleaned with lime water; or still better with a weak solution of carbonate of soda, or with water containing a weak solution of chloride of lime; after which they are rinsed in clean water and dried in the sunshine or in a stove. Afterward, beat them to remove any dust or loose dirt.

ANITA.—Having had no previous experience in writing for the press, it will be a long time before you can expect to compete with experienced authors thoroughly acquainted with the requirements of weekly and monthly publications. Of course the price paid for manuscripts varies greatly, there being no set standard adopted by publishers.

COOK.—Isinglass is a very pure form of gelatine, prepared from certain parts of several kinds of fish. The best is made from the air-bladders or sounds of the Russian sturgeon, twisted up in rolls or formed into cakes, which are afterwards torn into shreds or cut into fine shavings. First-class isinglass should be free from smell and taste, and perfectly soluble in boiling water.

FIRST SURREY.—If as a volunteer you are transferred with the permission of your commanding officer to another corps, you complete your engagement of four years, and require to serve only another year. We answer your second and third questions in the affirmative. As to the fourth question, you pay according to your rank. If the commanding officer refuses we do not know any remedy.

NELLIE.—The internal aids to a clear complexion are most of them well known, and the present season is the time for thorough cleansing and purifying of the blood. The old-fashioned remedy of sulphur and treacle is considered among the best. Charcoal powdered and taken with water is said to be excellent, but it is most difficult to take. A strictly vegetable and fruit diet is followed by many for one or two weeks.

A CONSTANT READER (Pittsford).—1. Cutting the ends of the hair frequently, and constant attention to brushing it well, will make it grow. 2. Almost any acid will remove warts. Dry pipeclay rubbed in frequently is a sure cure. 3. Take plenty of exercise, and avoid the use of sugar. Eat as little farinaceous food as possible, and drink very little. 4. We never attempt character-reading, either from hand writing or photographs.

UNHAPPY GLADYS.—Send the man back his ring, and forget all about him as soon as you can. He is not worth a thought. Girls are not expected to go and hunt their lovers up when they do not keep their appointments. It was his place to see you. There are plenty of true, good-hearted young fellows in the world, and a man who threatens to kill the woman he professes to love is a cowardly creature that you will be well rid of.

TRESPASS.—If you enter through a gate the private grounds surrounding a gentleman's house you may be at once ordered back; if you go, there is no case against you. If, however, you go over a fence to get in you are then in danger of being prosecuted for malicious mischief. Should you walk upon unenclosed land, moorland, or mountain side, you do not require to turn back when challenged, provided you give your name and address to the challenger.

FATIMA.—Vanilla is produced from a species of orchid that attaches itself to walls, trees and other suitable objects. The plant has a long, fleshy stem, and the leaves are alternate, oval and lanceolate. The flower is of a greenish-white colour, and forms axillary spikes. The fruit is a pod, measuring, when full grown, some ten or twelve inches in length and about half-an-inch in diameter. The quality of the pod can be determined by the presence or non-presence of a crystalline effluence called givre, and by its dark chocolate-brown colour.

ALICE.—Ireland for centuries has been celebrated for its manufacture of frieze and other rough woollen cloth, so that the Ulster coat is by no means a novelty. Stanthurst, who wrote in the reign of Elizabeth, and whose account of Ireland is published in Holinshed's "Chronicles," speaking of Waterford, says:—"As they distill the best aqua vite, so they spin the choicest rug in Ireland. A friend of mine, being of late demurrant in London, and the weather, by reason of a hard hoar frost, being somewhat nipping, repaired to Paris Garden clad in one of these Waterford rugs. The mastiff had no sooner espied him, but, deeming he had been a bear, would faine have baited him, and, were it not that the dogs were partly muzzled and partly chained, he doubted not but that he should have been well tugged in this Irish rug; whereupon he solemnly vowed never to see bear-baiting in any such weed."

THE LONDON READER, Post-free. Three-halfpence Weekly; or Quarterly One Shilling and Eightpence.

ALL BACK NUMBERS, PARTS and VOLUMES are in print, and may be had of all booksellers.

NOTICE.—Part 342, Now Ready, price Sixpence, post-free, Eightpence. Also Vol. LIV., bound in cloth, 4s. 6d.

ALL LETTERS TO BE ADDRESSED TO THE EDITOR OF THE LONDON READER, 334, Strand, W.C.

†† We cannot undertake to return rejected manuscripts.

London: Published for the Proprietor, at 334, Strand, by J. R. SPECK; and Printed by WOODFALL and KINDERS, 79 to 80, Long Acre, W.C.